

**A  
HISTORY  
FOR  
THE  
FUTURE:**

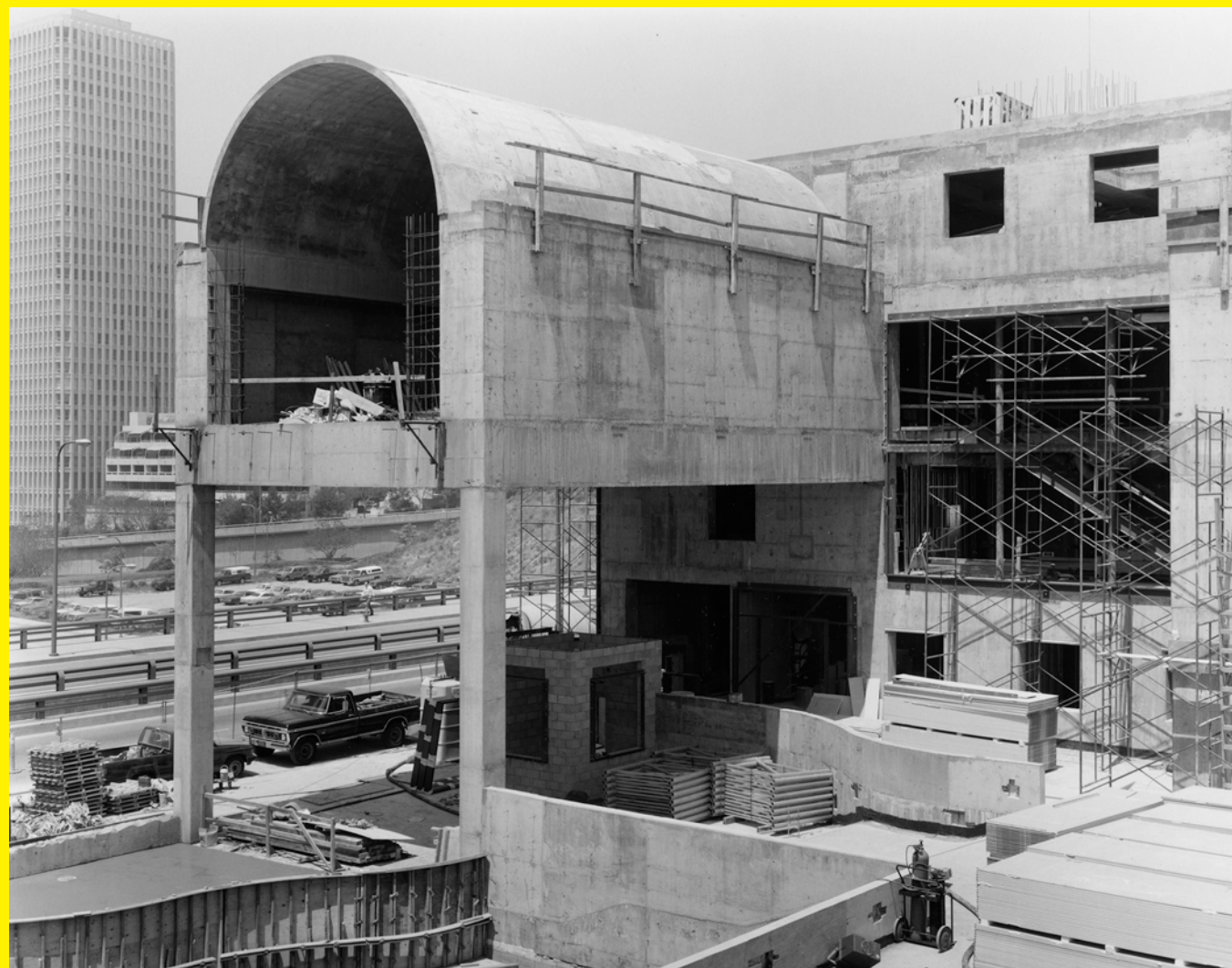
**THE  
MUSEUM  
OF  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART  
LOS  
ANGELES**

**1979-  
2000**













**I THINK WE SHOULD TALK TO THE ARTIST FIRST**

—Richard Koshalek





Pages 3-11 (all installation views)  
Mark Lere: *Halo/Wheel*, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Robert Gober, 1997, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Ann Hamilton: *the capacity of absorption*, 1988, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Robert Irwin, 1993, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Ad Reinhardt, 1991, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles























## INTRODUCTION: A SPECIAL RADIANCE

ERICA CLARK

*“Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists ... worlds which ... send us still each one its special radiance.”*

—Marcel Proust

Many great enterprises harbor tales of white heat, of the mysterious force that gives way to a new, full-blown creation with astonishing speed and authority. In these stories, an alchemic mix of timing and obsession dissolves existing constraints to achieve the seemingly impossible.

Most such tales tend toward fable, but not the story of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. MOCA's founding and emergence on the international art scene is a true account of white heat, of multiple forces combining and compressing to produce something genuinely new and influential. At a time when many museums are urgently revisiting their initial purpose and mission, a close examination of this landmark event in American cultural history is more relevant than ever.

I arrived at MOCA in 1987, eight years after its dramatic birth, yet the heat had not abated. No longer was the museum a brash upstart defying its penniless origins; gone were the days of the tiny staff working in borrowed offices. What remained was the certainty that this still-new kid on the block had the power to transform not only downtown Los Angeles, but the entire region into a world destination for contemporary art and art-making of many kinds. It was already doing it.

From the moment I stepped inside the new museum, I savored the atmosphere of energy and audacity. I was weary of my job at a university, encased in a rigid hierarchy that sapped any desire to show up in the morning. At this new place, the freedom was palpable. Growing up in New York as the child of artists, my favorite afternoons were spent in MoMA's Sculpture Garden or wandering around The Met. Arriving at MOCA, it was immediately clear that here, “exhibition programs” meant far more than paintings and sculpture in cold rooms where one had to whisper. I realized that in two vastly different and beautiful buildings within walking distance of each other, “exhibitions” embraced theater, architecture, and dance, along with entire new bodies of painting and sculpture. I sensed that I, too, could have a creative voice here that would be heard. Today this breadth and inclusion are increasingly common among museums, but MOCA paved the way.



This book, for the first time, describes the unique circumstances that gave rise to MOCA's founding in 1979, and the perpetually charged twenty years that followed. MOCA was born at a pivotal moment in Los Angeles, following the demise of the few institutions that supported contemporary art and art-making, most notably the Pasadena Art Museum and the legendary Ferus Gallery. Naysayers likened the art scene of the early '70s to a mugging victim, battered and scared. Newcomers depicted the city as “a big, weird blank canvas,” “a cultural backwater.”

They were wrong. The “blankness” that baffled those less familiar with Southern California was in fact suffused with space, light, and the lack of an established canon—the very things imbuing the region's artists with unique strengths. The sheer distance from East Coast artistic angst was powerful in itself. By the end of the '70s, Southern California was simmering with creative energy, particularly among a loosely grouped community of artists eager to achieve larger visibility in the face of long-standing New York dominance. These artists sensed that that L.A. was at a make-or-break moment: a juncture at which the city could take a giant step forward by bringing world attention to the ferment brewing in one of the most creative places anywhere—or lose, perhaps forever, the opportunity to position L.A. as a vibrant new nexus for contemporary art and culture.

At the same time, the city's governing figures, like rulers throughout the ages, were seeking ways to leave important edifices as their legacy. They increasingly trained their sights on the vexing challenge of downtown L.A., which had become a desolate void in a decentralized urban landscape. So when the opportunity arose to establish a major new museum downtown, the disparate camps of artists, business, and politics came together in a new “leadership equation,” with a shared force and commitment not seen before or since.

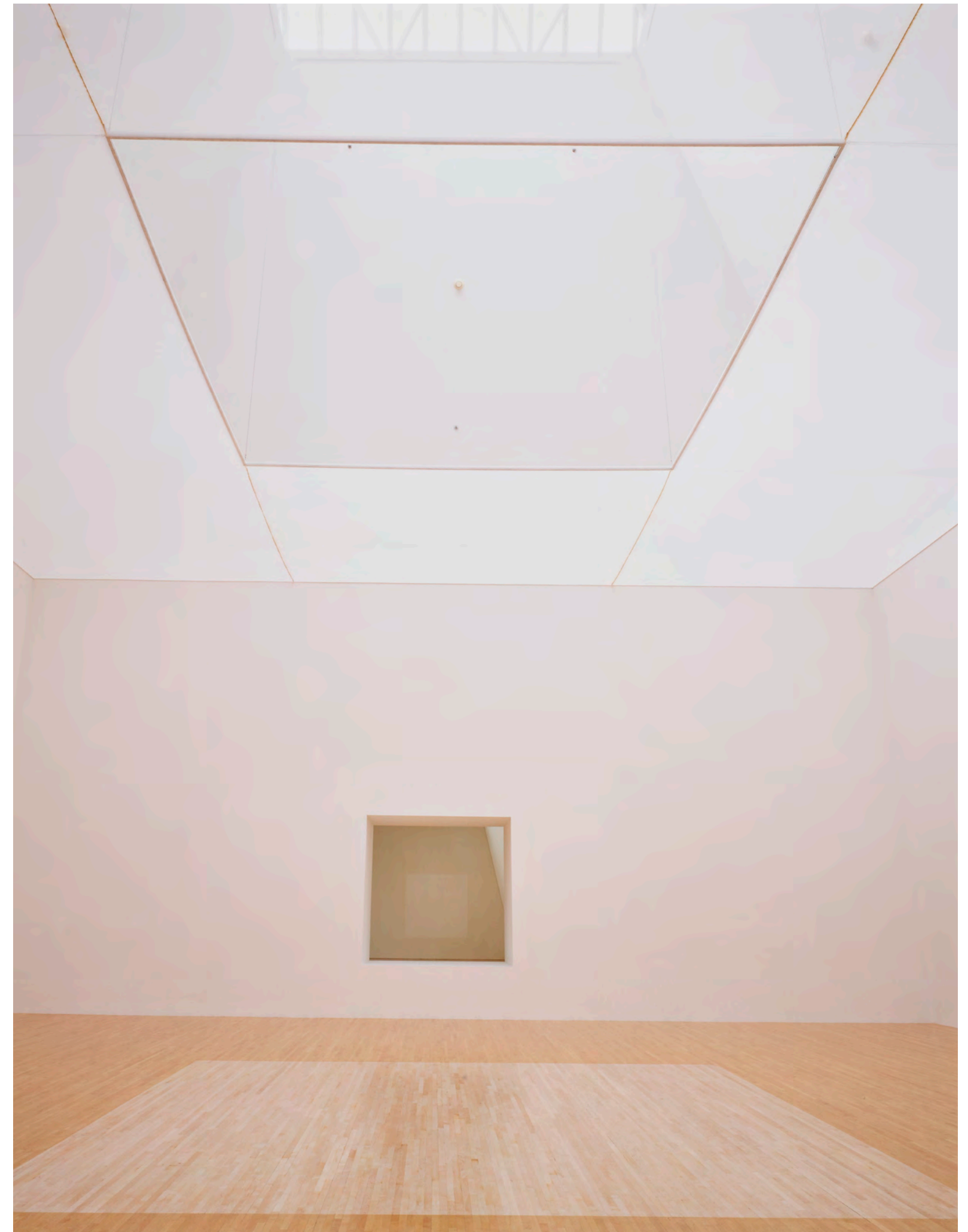
This volume is an unprecedented gathering of recollections and reflections by those who brought MOCA into its flourishing early life: prominent civic and cultural figures, artists, curators and other museum staff, collectors and donors, critics and journalists, architects. Their individual texts are threaded throughout the book's

primary sections, which include an expansive historical narrative, an evaluation of MOCA's profound influence on architectural practice, and the most detailed chronology of the institution to date. The resulting kaleidoscope of perspectives befits the intricate story at hand. As the writer Rebecca Solnit observes,

*Sometimes clarity requires complexity ... the way many fibers are twisted into a thread means that following a thread should mean unraveling it or recognizing the individual strands.*

Above all, this book shows how the threads that wove MOCA into existence were due not only to a confluence of will and timing, but to the power of collective determination and brilliance. The “hero” myth of single-handed creation stops here. This book celebrates an all-too-rare joint endeavor that united many leaders—highly visible public figures as well as those behind-the-scenes—to build an entirely new kind of cultural institution at astounding speed. Naturally there were some epic, very public battles of egos; after all, every fundamental decision was on the line, from the choice of the warehouse that would become The Temporary Contemporary to the selection of the permanent building's architect, the early collection acquisitions, and much more. In spite of these rockier episodes, a firm unity of purpose prevailed among everyone involved.

Certain individuals merit special acclaim for their visionary leadership during this time. These include Sam Francis, Robert Irwin, and DeWain Valentine, among the first artists to publicly champion the new museum; Mayor Tom Bradley and UCLA Chancellor Franklin Murphy, true statesmen for their city; a core group of business leaders and early trustees, including Frederick M. Nicholas, David Lavenhol, William F. Kieschnick, Carl Hartnack, Lenore S. Greenberg, Laura-Lee Woods, Betye Monell Burton, Lillian Lovelace, Marcia Simon Weisman, Beatrice Gersh, David Geffen, Dallas Price-Van Breda, and Morton M. Winston; and, naturally, the museum's great architects, Frank Gehry and Arata Isozaki, along with its initial director, Pontus Hultén, and the very first staff member, Sherri Geldin. Each played an irreplaceable role in making MOCA a thriving reality.





EVERYTHING SEEMED FEASIBLE, AND COMPROMISE WAS NOT AN OPTION. WITHIN THIS EXTRAORDINARY OPERATIONAL LATITUDE, THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MOCA'S ARCHITECTURE AND ITS PROGRAMMING BECAME VIVIDLY CLEAR: THE RADICAL CONTRASTS BETWEEN GEHRY'S TEMPORARY CONTEMPORARY STRUCTURE AND ISOZAKI'S GRAND AVENUE BUILDING IN THEMSELVES ENABLED SPECIFIC ARTISTIC IDEALS TO BE REALIZED, AND EACH SITE INHERENTLY ENHANCED THE WORKS ON VIEW.



Ann Hamilton: *the capacity of absorption*, 1988, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

From the beginning, the museum's evolution was also propelled by the boundless energy of one person, Richard Koshalek. Two days after I arrived, Richard asked me to prepare a major funding proposal in forty-five minutes. It was my birthday. I thought, "I can still quit." I stayed, we got the grant, and forty-five-minute deadlines soon seemed routine. Galvanized by Richard's force and clarity, all hands were always on deck.

MOCA's early programs emanated an electricity and ambition rare for a museum of any size: In two decades, the museum produced over two hundred exhibitions and eighty-seven catalogues spanning all visual disciplines, as well as various radio, performance, and literature series; from the beginning, the aim was to be universal in outlook. No undertaking was too large, and nothing was done halfway. Amass a great permanent collection, the envy of other institutions, in less than ten years? Cut a giant new door in The Temporary Contemporary in order to drive in the truck and crane necessary to install multi-ton Richard Serra sculptures? Remove and replace an entire wall and air ducts in Gallery A for Bob Irwin's magical portal? Line entire gallery walls and floors with printer's type, moss, and beeswax for Ann Hamilton's visual poetry? Build two full-scale replicas of Case Study houses inside The TC? Change everything on view—daily—in the huge John Cage exhibition, using the artist's "chance operations" process? Why not? Everything seemed feasible, and compromise was not an option. Within this extraordinary operational latitude, the correspondence between MOCA's architecture and its programming became vividly clear: The radical contrasts between Gehry's Temporary Contemporary structure and Isozaki's Grand Avenue building in themselves enabled specific artistic ideals to be realized, and each site inherently enhanced the works on view.

Many of MOCA's early achievements also reflected the tolerance for risk characteristic of youth. Everyone at the museum in the 1980s and '90s was *literally* young. Like new parents who realize that their offspring is a prodigy, everyone focused with laser intensity on ensuring the very best for the dazzling creature, whatever it took. Yet the chances taken during these early years were not reckless. Idealistic goals were coupled with fiscal planning and oversight; budgets were met. And the intense focus paid off again and again, from the first matchless

permanent acquisitions to the exhibitions and to the media coverage and public attention that followed.

But prodigies may become fragile as they age. MOCA was conceived in a period when there was still broad agreement that cultural institutions were a benefit to society overall. Today it might seem surprising that MOCA was largely built by and for one constituency: artists. As the ensuing years demonstrated, it would not be possible to sustain the utopian vision of the museum as a public space for individual artistic endeavors, a studio-laboratory writ large. Even by the late '80s, America was entering an era in which wealth generation and the bottom line would take precedence over creative exploration and discovery, especially in the public arena. In the visual arts, the trend-hungry interests of dealers and collectors were diverging from those of museums—especially evident in the commodification of contemporary art. As the social commentator Kyle Chayka notes, "Art becomes retail surprisingly quickly."

During its first two decades, however, MOCA exerted an outsize impact on cultural institutions and the urban environment alike. The new museum blew fresh air into the life of its city. The exhibition programs, perennially surprising and probing, didn't pander to art-world trends or pressures at home and elsewhere (including the occasional requests by Hollywood personalities to exhibit their own artistic creations). They avoided commercial cynicism, didn't privilege any art form or creative expression over another, and they fostered new kinds of educational initiatives. In the words of the eminent art historian and former J. Paul Getty Museum director John Walsh: "You didn't know what was going to happen next and whatever it was, it was going to be, somehow, expanding you. I think there must have been many, many, many—thousands of us—who had our first important experiences at The TC.... Those shows taught without pontificating, without using a whole lot of precious language. They just had experience there for you."

Yet despite its regional beginnings and ties, MOCA was never conceived as a "California" museum; rather, its founding vision was based on the conviction that international stature would derive from its specific locale and context. Attention was paid: The number of MOCA-generated exhibitions that traveled to other



national and international venues, as well as the programs borrowed from other institutions, was unprecedented for such a young institution. MOCA's creation directly inspired other arts institutions worldwide, from the Tate Modern to MASS MoCA and more—while immeasurably enhancing L.A.'s allure as a nexus for the art of our time. By comparison, other museums seemed staid.

At the same time, as a *Los Angeles Times* editorial proclaimed, “MOCA Stitched Itself Into L.A.'s Fabric”—literally—with lasting effects on the city's overall visibility as a beacon for art and design. Via multiple exhibitions and its two landmark buildings, the museum became an advocate for contemporary architecture throughout Southern California and beyond. The hugely successful adaptation of an “ordinary” neglected warehouse into The Temporary Contemporary, and the resulting dynamics between “temporary” and permanent structures, and “high and low” aesthetics, informed other practitioners and projects worldwide.

The civic, urbanist spirit that animated many of MOCA's early programs was especially evident in the side-walk-level display of Frank Gehry's models for the Walt Disney Concert Hall; the public's interest in the exhibition spurred the drive to complete construction of the landmark building across the street. The museum's downtown presence helped to revitalize the Grand Avenue corridor and the Little Tokyo neighborhood overall, and to promote the development of the nascent Arts District. “Everybody loved the idea that we were going to this kind of leftover piece of L.A. which had its own grandeur,” says Walsh.

This book has been conceived as a collaborative tribute to MOCA's founding spirit and energy, and to the artists and the city by and for whom the museum was created. Each of the primary contributors has also been immersed in the cultural life of L.A. since the time of the museum's founding. The writer Louise Steinman, whose extensive narrative both separates and weaves the threads of MOCA's history, is also a curator and performance artist who founded and directed the acclaimed ALOUD literary series at the Los Angeles Central Library for twenty-five years. Her essay, derived in part from dozens of interviews coordinated by the architecture historian Dana

Hutt, is also a journalistic achievement. The prominent architecture critic Joseph Giovannini, a native son, provides a penetrating analysis of MOCA's architecture and its effects on the urban landscape. Alma Ruiz, MOCA's pioneering curator of Latin American art and friend of artists worldwide, meticulously assembled the book's detailed chronology.

As befits its subject, the book is an important visual record as well. The dozens of images gathered by Alma, Louise, and former MOCA curator Julie Lazar, were provided with boundless generosity by many of the artists, photographers, and donors associated with the museum's construction and early programs; together, these images constitute a vital archival treasure. The volume itself is intended to be a designed object reflecting the aesthetic standards that distinguished MOCA from the outset. All of these components were stitched into a unified whole under the superb editorial guidance of Laurie Winer, co-founder of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*; her unflappable calm in dealing with the many complexities of this book was a gift to us all.

And finally, as with so much of MOCA itself, this independent publication originated with one person: Richard Koshalek. Again and again, as the museum's director and in his work before and since, Richard has proven what sheer dynamism, unflinching devotion and service to creativity and art, and trust in others' abilities can accomplish. Matchless raconteur, piercingly astute observer, loyal friend and confidant of artists of all kinds, Richard is the very definition of a driving force that can produce the impossible, and does.

The aim of this book is not to seal MOCA's early years in amber, a nostalgic memory. It is not a faultless history; today, for example, one might label the programming and staff insufficiently diverse. Yet one could also argue that the mere creation of a museum by and for Los Angeles artists diversified the larger art world in that very different time—as did many of the early exhibitions that presented women artists and lesser-known figures who went on to greater fame. (The catalogues from these early shows have also become invaluable educational resources accessible to a far wider audience today.) And more than any museum in that era, MOCA fearlessly

engaged with pressing social and cultural issues through its inclusive and then-unconventional exhibitions and programs, including radio shows, literary series, and performance art. Most of these programs would seem as fresh and timely if presented today: further proof that from its inception, MOCA was constantly laying the groundwork for the future. Witness, among many examples, the *Case Study* and *Uncommon Sense* exhibitions, which directly inspired the design and building of new affordable housing in two different Los Angeles neighborhoods. Or the brilliant (alas, unbuilt) plan, also documented herein, to transform the site in front of The TC into a high-tech, multidisciplinary “creative gathering space” and urban platform embracing the myriad cultures that collide in downtown L.A. Or Barbara Kruger's monumental 1990 wall work, *Untitled (Questions)*, which, re-installed thirty years later on The TC's exterior, blazed even more fiercely than before.

The timing of this book is not coincidental. The survival of cultural institutions today is far more perilous than when MOCA burst upon the scene. If, as the writer Luc Sante says, “The past is always in flux as a dynamic undercurrent,” the true gift of the past lies in its capacity to inform the ever-fluctuating present. Despite the fact that MOCA evolved in a unique setting with an equally unique cast of characters, the museum's genesis continues to provide an extraordinary example for institutions and practitioners in many creative fields. Above all, we hope that this book will help to promote the shared vision and determination necessary to overcome the enormous challenges in today's cultural landscape. Many museums and other cultural organizations are already responding to these challenges, developing new conceptual approaches and ways to engage audiences. If these institutions understand and respond to their own specific elements of time and place with verve and discernment, they, too, will emanate the special radiance that shone at MOCA.

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**M O C A** **WHO IS BEYOND THE LAW? WHO IS BOUGHT**  
**AND SOLD? WHO IS FREE TO CHOOSE? WHO**  
**DOES TIME? WHO FOLLOWS ORDERS? WHO SALUTES LONGEST?**  
**WHO PRAYS LOUDEST? WHO DIES FIRST? WHO LAUGHS LAST?**

AT THE TEMPORARY CONTEMPORARY







# A HISTORY FOR THE FUTURE:

# THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART LOS ANGELES

# 1979- 2000

RICHARD KOSHALEK  
FORMER DIRECTOR, MOCA

ERICA CLARK  
JOSEPH GIOVANNINI  
ALMA RUIZ  
LOUISE STEINMAN

DESIGN  
BRAD BARTLETT



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A TALE OF TWO BUILDINGS, ONE DIRECTOR, AND THE MUSEUM IN THE EXPANDED FIELD JOSEPH GIOVANNINI 102
THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART: A DETAILED CHRONOLOGY, 1979–2000 ALMA RUIZ WITH PERSPECTIVES CONTRIBUTORS 145
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## IN APPRECIATION

The creation of a new cultural institution of international standing requires the involvement of individuals with the foresight and generosity—in every sense—to commit to a highly complex endeavor. Over the first twenty years of MOCA's history, the museum was fortunate to have a large number of these distinguished individuals on board. Many are mentioned in the essays that follow, and all deserve continuing appreciation by the cultural and civic communities whose presence, in Los Angeles and far beyond, they enhanced.

Many of these individuals also felt over time that it was essential to document the early history of the museum because it was extraordinary in so many respects.

It is a pleasure to thank the people and the foundations below who have made this book possible. We are forever grateful.

Richard Koshalek  
Former Director  
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Spring 2022

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**TRUE COMMITMENT:  
ONE MAN'S DEDICATION  
TO THE EVOLUTION OF  
LOS ANGELES**

That the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art has recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary is, as much as anything, a tribute to the spirit and vision of Frederick M. Nicholas. Long before the Geffen Contemporary and the Arata Isozaki-designed galleries became iconic features of the city's cultural landscape, Fred grasped the importance such places would have on local, regional, and international levels. At a time when individual artists were transforming Los Angeles while the city's political and institutional will to support them was at a bleak ebb, Fred was one of very few people who leaped into action. Without him, we would not have seen the bold cultural initiative that helped to redefine Los Angeles as a true international city long into the future.

In his remarkable life now past the century mark, Fred has made an indelible mark on the city in which he has long lived and which he deeply loves. From his founding and support of Public Counsel legal services for indigent residents in desperate need, to the development of the Walt Disney Concert Hall, to his trustee leadership at MOCA in the roles of president and chairman, Fred has continually and selflessly given of his time, intellect, and boundless generosity in every way. At Disney Hall—arguably the most important architectural icon in the history of Los Angeles—it was Fred, while serving as first chairman of the Walt Disney Concert Hall Committee, who oversaw the process that selected Frank Gehry as the Hall's architect and Nagata & Associates as its acoustics consultants.

None of this would have been possible without Fred's fundamental understanding of and respect for the essential role of the creative individual within a community. As a patron of the arts, as a collector, as a friend of artists, architects, and museum curators—and as an esteemed colleague in his lifelong career as a prominent attorney—Fred's advocacy for the exercise of creative ability has had the broadest possible effect on the life of Los Angeles. Cities that achieve greatness do so because of the rare citizens who expand their boundaries, both literal and spiritual. Los Angeles will always be fortunate to have Fred as an inspired example of this leadership.

We are proud to dedicate this book, representing one of Fred's most significant projects, to this wonderful man and to the memory of his beautiful and equally engaged wife, Joan.



**MOCA REFLECTED LOS ANGELES,  
THAT SOMETHING BRASH COULD HAPPEN.**

—Richard Koshalek



# THE QUESTIONS WE ASK

LOUISE STEINMAN

## PART I: CAN YOU TWO WORK TOGETHER?

In July of 1980, Richard Koshalek, the thirty-eight-year-old director of the Hudson River Museum, boarded Metro North at Grand Central Station. He settled into his window seat, unfolded his *New York Times* and opened to the arts section. A headline caught his eye: “Los Angeles Putting Focus on Modern Art.” The piece heralded the building of a new institution to be named The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). Out of curiosity, Koshalek scanned the piece and was dumbfounded to see his own name listed as one of the leading contenders for the position of director. “I just thought, ‘Well, there’s some mistake here.’”

A few days later, he received a call from someone named Eli Broad, the co-founder of a Detroit business that became Kaufman & Broad, one of the country’s largest home builders. Broad and his wife Edythe had relocated to Los Angeles, where they were beginning to be seen as important collectors of art. “Richard, we’d like to talk to you about this new museum,” Broad said. Koshalek booked a flight to Los Angeles.

According to the article, one of Koshalek’s rivals for the position was Martin Friedman, the innovative director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Known for his superb curatorial eye and for championing international and little-known artists, Friedman was in many ways the most inclusive museum director in the country. His overarching philosophy was that if you can somehow reach people who think they don’t understand or like art, you open them up to a thrilling experience they will then seek out for the rest of their lives.

Friedman in fact had hired Koshalek for his first job in the art world. In 1967 Friedman was looking for someone to oversee a city-wide plan for temporary art installations during the two-year period when the Walker would be without a physical home. The original 1927 building was about to be razed and replaced with a new one by Edward Larrabee Barnes, an elegantly minimalist museum with spacious, open galleries. At that time Koshalek was working for an architecture firm after earning his master’s degree in architecture and art history from the University of Minnesota. When he arrived for his interview with Friedman, he wondered why he was threading his way through an armada of motorcycles in the museum’s parking lot. It turned out that hundreds of Hell’s Angels had arrived to see the Walker’s just-opened show *Light, Space, and Motion*. In one of the galleries, Koshalek was thrilled to meet the great Chilean abstract painter Roberto Matta, who was in vigorous discussion with an installer about how he might hang his paintings from the ceiling. A connective energy hovered in the air. “I wanted that engagement, that involvement, with the creative individual,” Koshalek recalls.

Koshalek was hired, and over the next two years he helped artists install their works in department stores, abandoned buildings, vacant lots, and other



unexpected venues around Minneapolis. *The Museum Without Walls*, as it was called, was a significant step in taking curated art outside of the institution and putting it in the path of people who otherwise might never have seen it.

After leaving the Walker, Koshalek became an assistant director at the National Endowment for the Arts, where he helped write the guidelines for a nascent Art in Federal Buildings program. Every Monday morning, he boarded a plane from D.C. for somewhere in the country to oversee one of the NEA's various public-art projects—fifty commissions in fifty states. Among them, a 53-foot-high Alexander Calder sculpture for Chicago's Federal Plaza in Chicago, another large work by Isamu Noguchi for the Municipal Building in Honolulu, and Louise Nevelson's *Bicentennial Dawn*, twenty-nine intricately patterned white wood columns for the James A. Byrne Federal Courthouse in Philadelphia. “We were just starting to learn,” Koshalek says, “how artwork for the public sector should not be studio-designed and then enlarged in scale, but had to be directly designed for the site.” During these years a key question grew in his consciousness: “Why should art have to fit into four walls?”

—

By the time I met Koshalek in 1994, he'd been the director of The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles for twelve years. I'd been recently hired as cultural programs director for the newly reopened Central Library, a jewel of downtown architecture and a Grand Avenue neighbor of MOCA's.

The library's iconic Art Deco building with the pyramid on its rooftop, designed by Bertram Goodhue in 1926, had suffered two disastrous arson fires in 1986, destroying more than 200,000 books. For years preceding the actual conflagration, a vigorous debate had raged between, on one side, librarians and researchers who suffered from working in the deteriorating building, and preservationists opposed to demolishing the cramped building, which lacked sprinklers. The aftermath of the fires united the larger community, resulting in a huge outpouring of citizen and corporate support. A “Save the Books” campaign, co-chaired by ARCO chairman Lodwick M. Cook and Mayor Tom Bradley, raised more than

\$10 million with which the architectural firm of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer rehabilitated the core of the old building and constructed a new east wing, named for Bradley.

For the grand reopening in October 1993, thousands lined up by the long reflecting pool, the library's pastel exterior glowing in the morning light. We knew, however, that as much as Angelenos loved their library, it was not going to be easy to persuade them to come downtown for our evening programs. I'd grown up in the 1950s and '60s in Culver City, on the city's ocean-cooled west side, and I remember begging my mother not to make me go downtown. It wasn't the yearly doctor's check-up I feared, it was the throat-clotting, eye-stinging smog.

I moved back to L.A. in 1988, after a divorce and a car accident, and without a plan. Misfortunes roiled my re-entry. Both of my parents died in 1990, followed soon after by the homicide of a close cousin. In 1992 the city exploded in a violent uprising after the acquittal of four police who savagely beat an unresisting Black motorist named Rodney King. I remember the moment when a would-be Paul Revere pounded on the door of my East Hollywood apartment shouting, “The riots have begun!”

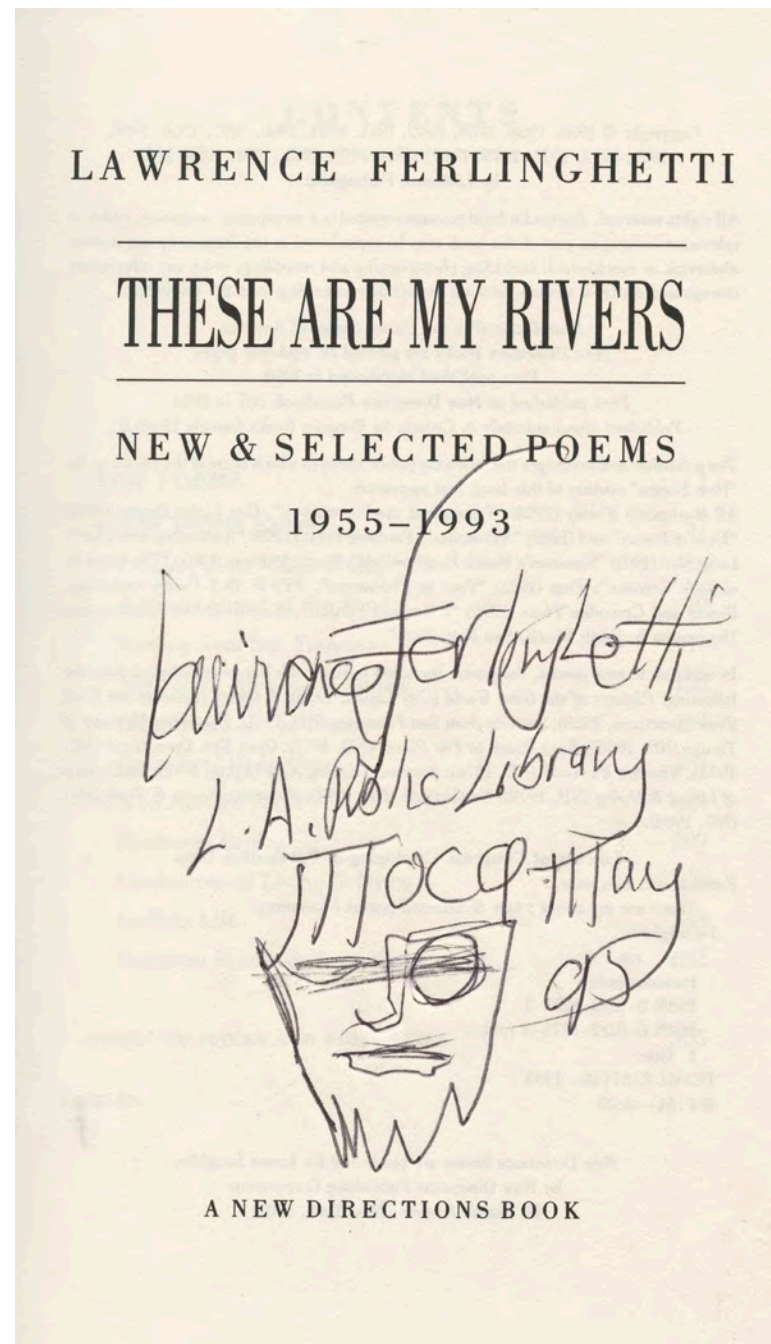
When I began working at the Central Library the following year, the downtown streets were dark and empty at night, the vibe ominous. The splendid old movie palaces were shuttered or repurposed as Sunday swap meets. The department stores were long gone. During the day, though, the city's working and non-working poor shared the bustling sidewalks with the bankers and lawyers employed in the shiny skyscrapers on Bunker Hill, that acropolis of the city, at one time a thriving community of old Victorian mansions and rooming houses. By the early 1960s, Bunker Hill had been leveled in one of the largest and most dramatic examples of what was cheerily described by city planners and developers as “urban renewal.” As Los Angeles historian Norman M. Klein notes in his essential book about the city, *The History of Forgetting*, a vibrant, mixed-class community was “not only destroyed but literally erased from memory.”

On the east side of downtown, a trickle of polluted water known as the L.A. River snaked down miles of concrete flood channel, just blocks from a teeming Skid Row,





KOSHALEK WAS PARTICULARLY EXCITED TO FORGE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN VISUAL ARTISTS AND WRITERS, ATTRACTING NEW AUDIENCES AND SUPPORT TO MOCA WHILE HELPING TO UNIFY A FAR-FLUNG ARTS COMMUNITY.



Lawrence Ferlinghetti, from first season of *Racing Towards the Millennium: Voices of the American West*, 1995, Los Angeles

home to one of the nation's largest unsheltered populations. There were also cheap studios to be had among the rescue missions, SROs, and abandoned warehouses, some of them occupied by a small but hardy community of artists. Al's Bar and Gorky's Café, open all day and night, were the places to go when you needed a shot of whiskey or a bowl of borscht. Another favorite was the Atomic Café—the place to hang out when the downtown clubs let out at 2 am—where the jukebox played the 45s of local punk bands. But, while lifestyle writers were forever prophesizing downtown to be the next SoHo, walking the streets at night was distinctly hazardous.

The Central Library reopening brought with it real hope for the area. Landscape architect Lawrence Halprin's handsome new "Spanish Steps" transformed some undistinguished concrete into a whimsical yet elegant grand staircase, which, once the new Central Library opened, connected it to corporate Bunker Hill, where MOCA had been humming along for seven years. You could feel a burgeoning energy—at least during the day—for re-invigorating and re-inhabiting downtown. It was around this time that I heard through a mutual friend that Erica Clark, MOCA's development director and a great reader, was keen to start a literary series for the museum. Why not join forces?

I soon met with Clark and Koshalek, a discerning and congenial man, who asked some good questions and then, without further ado, bestowed his blessing and a start-up budget for this first-ever partnership between the art museum and the city library. Koshalek was particularly excited to forge connections between visual artists and writers, attracting new audiences and support to MOCA while helping to unify a far-flung arts community. "There was no resistance whatsoever," Erica Clark recalls. "Every idea that seemed good was worth exploring as long as it didn't threaten to lower the institution's or a project's standards."

Calling the series *Racing Towards the Millennium*, we invited novelists, poets, and essayists whose work we deemed critical to the issues bearing down on us, our nation, and the world as we careened toward a new century. Readings and discussions took place in the intimate auditoriums of both institutions. Octavia E.

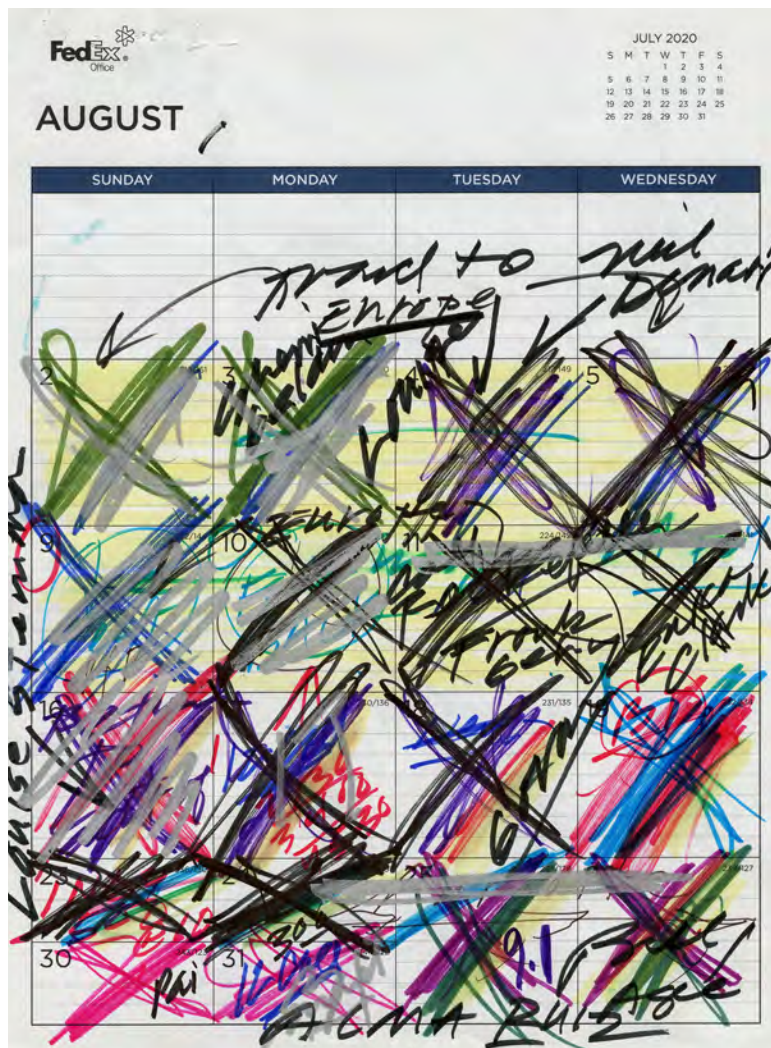
Butler, an L.A. native who had been among the hundreds of volunteers freeze-drying wet and charred books in the aftermath of the Central Library fire, spoke about how science fiction allowed her to write about sexually and/or racially egalitarian societies "that don't exist anywhere on earth today." Poet Lewis MacAdams shared his vision for restoring the L.A. River—a trash-choked waterway many Angelenos did not even know existed—calling his project "a forty-year artwork." Essayist Richard Rodriguez told us that the seeds of the city's rebirth lay deep inside its darkest nights, amidst sirens and fires and panic, because these were the times when Angelenos realized that "what was happening on the other side of town implicated them as well." The partnership lasted for five years, then morphed into the ALOUD series at the library, which is still ongoing decades later.

At seventy-nine, Koshalek has entered his distinguished statesman phase, gray-blue eyes friendly behind dark-rimmed glasses. He's describing the configuration of "the city within the city"—one of his early concepts for MOCA. Using three different colored pens, he draws angular shapes in bold calligraphic strokes on the menu of the Pasadena restaurant where we're lunching: "There was a building here, a pedestrian-only street there, and artists' studios over there." His delight in remembering the planning stages of this never-realized project is notable. To converse one-on-one with Richard is to feel his buoyancy, his optimism, his restlessness. He likes to consider what comes next while I'm trying to figure out what just happened. He is not a man who likes to sit still for too long. "In another life," says Erica Clark, "he would have been an Arctic explorer."

His optimism, he tells me, is a legacy from his father, who, as project manager on large-scale electrical construction projects, was involved in building everything from department stores in Nebraska to a taconite-processing plant in Silver Bay, Minnesota. To help pay for college, Koshalek spent a memorable summer on one of his father's projects, helping surveyors lay out a U.S. Air Force base in Glasgow, Montana. His father, he said, took on tasks without concern for scale or complexity. "He believed that you use the force of your own will to better the community."



TO CONVERSE ONE-ON-ONE WITH RICHARD IS TO FEEL HIS BUOYANCY, HIS OPTIMISM, HIS RESTLESSNESS. HE LIKES TO CONSIDER WHAT COMES NEXT WHILE I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT JUST HAPPENED. HE IS NOT A MAN WHO LIKES TO SIT STILL FOR TOO LONG.



Richard Koshalek's calendar, August 2020



We are discussing the shape and content of this book-to-be, a history of MOCA's beginnings, the philosophy behind it, the cultural void that summoned its creation, the traumas and triumphs of the museum's first twenty years, and what future leaders might learn from this story. We make a list of the curators, architects, and artists whose memories we want to compile, the people who made it happen.

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In 1975, the Fort Worth Art Museum recruited Koshalek, then working at the NEA, to be its new director. When queried, Martin Friedman advised his friend against taking the job; the institution had just doubled its gallery space, an expansion that had saddled it with a deficit. But Koshalek saw an opportunity to do something different. He told a reporter at the time that he thought all contemporary U.S. museums were “basically the same, each with its Stellas, its Rothkos, etc.” and that he wanted to give the Fort Worth Art Museum “a real identity.” His approach was two-pronged: he would draw on the work of local and regional artists and also invite national and international figures to comment on the state's mythic properties.

Large, iconic work came out of the *Great American Rodeo*, Koshalek's first exhibition in Fort Worth, which serendipitously coincided with the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976. Robert Rauschenberg created *Rodeo Palace*, a 16-foot-long and 12-foot-high “combine”—meaning it combined two-dimensional images with objects in three dimensions. It featured three doors that opened onto silkscreened images of objects—keys, sheets, rope, and pillows—culled from the artist's Texas childhood. Red Grooms built an immense (1,237-square-foot) walk-through cartoon, *Ruckus Rodeo*, which depicted the animals, and human handlers of the rodeo in their chaotic, garish glory. Photographer Garry Winogrand captured the performers, animals, and attendees at the Fort Worth Stock and Rodeo Show in eighty striking and sometimes disturbing black-and-white images; Stephen Shore documented small-town Texas architecture. The celebrated French photographer and filmmaker Henri Cartier-Bresson, who had chronicled decisive moments of human life around the world, was also lined up to take photos of everyday Texans, though after Koshalek left, that plan fell through.

Koshalek also used his time in Fort Worth to expand the definition of a museum into a laboratory for art, inviting California artist Robert Irwin to explore his growing preoccupation with how we perceive space and light. Irwin made his living by betting on horses and wandering the country, as Randy Kennedy put it in *The New York Times*, “like a kind of secular holy fool, offering lectures on his project of general peripatetic availability.”

*Continuing Responses*, the resultant show, upended conventional museum locations and timeframes. Part of Irwin's practice was to tweak the everyday. Working with lights, tinted gels, fabric, and fabric scrims, the artist created “site-conditioned” installations in a hallway, a solarium, and other unexpected places in and near the museum. Museum-goers were invited to watch his process at every stage, as well as later, when the artist returned every few months over a period of two years to modify his work, sometimes to build an entirely new piece. Irwin's “research” eventually took him outside the museum, where he created, with minimal means, an evanescent environment in the Texas scrubland. Irwin disallowed photography; the experience was the art. For these ephemeral installations there's no visual record to help describe what was there, or was not there, or was barely there.

To boost attendance for the Irwin project and other challenging museum exhibitions, Koshalek and his team launched a low-cost outreach plan. Ads in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (which lacked an on-staff art critic), they noted, sold for the reasonable sum of \$1,450 for a full page. People were already used to doing the paper's crossword puzzles and clipping out grocery coupons, so why not create a tear-out art museum catalogue? With funding from the NEA, the museum commissioned a special newsprint section with critical essays, biographies of the artists, and additional information on particular exhibitions. Printed instructions read: “Please tear this newspaper catalogue out and bring it with you to the Fort Worth Art Museum. Come compare the writers' ideas to the original works of art.” The Sunday after the newspaper supplement appeared, people flocked to the museum to sit on benches reading it and taking their time to look at the artworks.



At times Koshalek’s mission to introduce new ideas backfired. He invited choreographer Deborah Hay, who’d been part of the performance collective at New York’s Judson Church, to perform a new piece called *Circle Dances*. The museum promoted the piece with ads all over town, drawing a large crowd to the venue, the gym at Texas Christian University. In attendance was a contingent of traditional Texas square dance aficionados who had misinterpreted the title of the event. When Deborah Hay and her company entered the gym naked, the audience, decked out in cowboy hats and petticoats, made a run for the exits. The story ended up on the front page of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. It was, Koshalek concedes with a grin, “a bit too radical for the city at the time.”

Koshalek’s shows put the Fort Worth Art Museum on the map, garnering critical praise from *The New York Times* and elsewhere. But not all the board members were happy with their innovative director, who made a habit of ignoring input from trustees. In 1976, while Koshalek was organizing an Edward Ruscha retrospective, the chairman of the board asked him to resign, fulfilling Martin Friedman’s prediction.

The next job offer came from the bankrupt Hudson River Museum, located on Warburton Avenue, in Westchester County, New York. Two miles north of the South Bronx and bypassed by major highways, the museum presented a different kind of regional challenge. The city of Yonkers had once been an upper-middle-class enclave, but by the time Koshalek arrived, it had lost much of its industry while somehow holding onto discriminatory practices in housing and education (after decades-long federal lawsuits, public schools there were finally integrated in 1988). Different community groups vied against each other for resources from City Hall, each demanding redress for pressing urban problems. Museum funding had been cut off in 1975. For a second time, Koshalek consulted with Martin Friedman. “Should I go to the Hudson River Museum?” Friedman advised: “No, Richard, it’s broke. There’s nothing you can do there. It has no funds. Just sit tight. Don’t do it.”

When Koshalek arrived there as museum director in 1977, Warburton Avenue was a street decimated by poverty, with boarded-up storefronts and buildings condemned

for demolition. “We can’t talk about beautiful imagery inside the museum,” Koshalek told his board, “while outside it’s a visual disaster. The museum has to become a partner with the city and the county in revitalizing the street.” This is where Koshalek, and his belief that museums must define themselves in the context of their location, got truly tested.

The architect Edward Larrabee Barnes, who had recruited Koshalek for the job, reminded him that, while the city of Yonkers was bankrupt and while there was terrible poverty within two miles of the museum, there was also—within ten miles—immense corporate wealth. Headquartered in Westchester County were major corporations such as Ciba-Geigy, General Foods, Pepsi, and IBM. There were resources here, Koshalek correctly surmised, to support unique ideas for the museum. He also had the support of a distinguished group of trustees: Charles DeCarlo, president of Sarah Lawrence College (located in Yonkers); Charles Tillinghast, former CEO of TWA (who’d ousted Howard Hughes from control of the airline); and Edward Larrabee Barnes himself, who lived in the area.

Koshalek positioned the museum into the local fray as a kind of broker, convening residents of the surrounding neighborhood—along with city planners, artists, and curators—to form the Warburton Avenue Community Workshop. The museum offered itself as neutral ground, a place where the community could come together to speak with a coherent voice in demanding change. Meanwhile the museum buildings were in such terrible shape that no institution would loan them paintings. “Every time we confronted a problem, we’d look for a solution,” Koshalek says.

Since there wasn’t much of a contemporary art collection, Koshalek commissioned artists to create installations that could then be acquired by the museum. Because the neighborhood was in transition and many people were afraid to come at night, Koshalek asked the artist Dan Flavin—rather than a lighting designer—to bring his operational poetry to the museum by installing fluorescent lights that functioned both as works of art and as sources of safety. The museum commissioned sculptor Richard Serra to study the possibility of a permanent

installation in an oval where cars dropped off passengers. Red Grooms took on a commission to create one of his huge walk-in installations, an exuberant celebration of bookstores, which then became the museum bookstore. Through the CETA Program (part of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty), Grooms hired unemployed people from the neighborhood as his assistants to help build the bookstore, which to this day is the most popular artwork in the museum’s permanent collection.

One exhibition, *Warburton Avenue: The Architecture of a Neighborhood*, memorialized its days of prosperity and days of decline, while musing on a general human failure to appreciate the past. Architect Hugh Hardy, who’d spent part of his childhood in a house on Warburton Avenue, designed the exhibition. Known for breathing new life into some of New York’s most storied theatrical landmarks—among them, Radio City Music Hall, the Majestic Theater, the New Victory Theater, the Joyce—the architect’s stellar reputation for innovative restoration attracted welcome press coverage to the project.

The Warburton Avenue show attempted to forecast the future, commissioning a 250-foot-long photographic re-envisioning of the street as it might look, as well as architectural plans for restoring the neighborhood’s burnt-out buildings and for turning a barricaded A&P market into a community center. Half of the facade of a condemned house from the area was installed inside the museum, the other half restored as a spur to imagining a better city. The museum also invited the community into the building for debates: bankers talked to local politicians about how to finally end the restrictive covenants that kept Blacks from owning property in certain sections, police and community leaders discussed foot patrols, and renters who could not receive funds to make home improvements testified to their difficulties in front of local council members.

“We connected to the river and the environment, but we also connected to the trauma that existed inside that community,” Koshalek says. “I always believed that museums should be places of activism, that we leave too many of our social decisions to lawyers and politicians. We should involve the most creative architects and artists in finding solutions to these same problems.”

As the museum, its art, and its city merged in new ways, people began to think and talk about what was going on in Westchester County. By the time Koshalek left the Hudson River Museum, he’d re-made it into an institution that focused on the living artist, making it, as critic John Russell said in *The New York Times*, “one of the livelier institutions in and around New York City ... a museum newly “in touch with yesterday, in touch with today, and in touch with tomorrow.”

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By 1964, Los Angeles was without a major museum devoted exclusively to modern art, let alone contemporary art. New York had MoMA, the Whitney, and the Guggenheim. Boston, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Houston, San Francisco, even nearby Laguna Beach all had modern art museums.

Los Angeles did have its art. J. Paul Getty’s impressive collection of bronze Greek warriors and Etruscan ceramics was warehoused at his Mediterranean villa on the Malibu bluffs, but the Getty Villa would not open to the public as a museum until 1974. At the former estate of railroad tycoon Henry Edwards Huntington in affluent San Marino, the galleries of the Huntington Library and Museum displayed exquisite Louis XIV-era furniture and iconic British paintings, like Thomas Gainsborough’s *The Blue Boy* and John Constable’s *View on the Stour near Dedham*. The Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, Science, and Art showcased its exhibitions in a massive Beaux Arts building in Exposition Park, across the street from the University of Southern California. This museum was dedicated in 1913 as part of the celebration of William Mulholland’s newly opened Owens Aqueduct, the controversial waterway that diverted water from Owens Valley, making it possible for Los Angeles to become a vast metropolis. Throughout my childhood in L.A., I sat for hours with my sketchbook in the cool dim Hall of North American Mammals, drawing dusty dioramas of bison herds charging across painted prairie. The museum’s eclectic art collection, what there was of it, was not easy to find. Robert Irwin recalled seeing his first Abstract Expressionist paintings there, after “walking through the dinosaurs.”



In 1965, one hundred years after The Metropolitan Museum was founded in New York, Los Angeles finally dedicated a museum devoted to art, though not exclusively modern art. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) separated from the Natural History Museum, taking its paintings and decorative objects and relocating them west to new buildings on Wilshire Boulevard. On the occasion of the new museum's opening, Peter Bart in *The New York Times* hailed it as an “alliance of California's ‘old families’ with the ‘new tycoons’ of the postwar boom.” Among its board members were Norton Simon, the art collector and billionaire founder of Val Vita Food Products and Hunt's Foods, and Edward W. Carter, who collected seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes.

But LACMA was never a dependably contemporary art museum. In the 1960s and '70s, if you hung out at artists' parties or at watering holes like Barney's Beanery on Santa Monica Boulevard, you'd likely hear griping about LACMA's anemic and sporadic attempts to address the local community. Expansion plans for a separate county-owned modern art facility had to be shelved after the passage of a tax bill called Proposition 13, an amendment to the state constitution approved by voters in June 1978 that restricted annual increases in property taxes, thereby constraining funding for schools and local services, including arts facilities. L.A.'s growing community of working artists and collectors worried that, without a proper museum to house them, important local contemporary art collections would be lost to Los Angeles.

LACMA did mount shows of contemporary art, such as curator Maurice Tuchman's *American Sculpture in the Sixties* (1967), and the landmark *Experiments in Art and Technology* (1971), which paired artists with local industrial partners to produce cross-disciplinary explorations (and, ironically, helped to catalyze the feminist art movement, since none of the seventy artists Tuchman chose were women). My strongest memory of that show was Robert Rauschenberg's astonishing *Mud Muse*, a tank of industrial bentonite clay mixed with water (similar to drilling fluid) that sputtered and bubbled, geysering and popping in response to auditory signals.

But Tuchman's shows did not have whole-hearted support from the museum board and certainly not from the

L.A. County Board of Supervisors. A case in point was Tuchman's 1967 retrospective of Edward Kienholz, the L.A. artist who, in the words of one curator, “chewed on the bones of Los Angeles like a man on a mission.” Kienholz's *Backseat Dodge* became the focus of the exhibition for reasons both artistic and political. For this tableau, the artist rebuilt a gray-blue 1938 Dodge resembling one his father had owned. In the backseat a young couple made of chicken-wire and plaster, their shoes and beer bottles askew, lock in an erotic embrace. They share one head as they partake, as Kienholz commented, “in a single-minded objective called mutual orgasm.”

Warren Dorn, chairman of the notoriously conservative Board of Supervisors, threatened to close down the show, deeming it “revolting, pornographic, and blasphemous.” A civic uproar ensued. When the dust settled, the two sides arrived on a compromise that only underlined the absurdity of the debate. Docents stationed in the museum's gallery opened the Dodge's passenger-side door for a twenty-second peek per viewer. Not yet eighteen, I passed as a “consenting adult” and waited among hundreds of other Angelenos in a long line to see Kienholz's work out of both curiosity and defiance.

In fact, Kienholz provided a crucial link to the West Coast's burgeoning art scene, the one haphazardly represented at LACMA. In 1956 he befriended its unofficial godfather, a grad student named Walter Hopps. For \$75 a month Hopps had been renting an eccentric three-unit building in the “slums of Brentwood,” as he called it, which he turned into Syndell Studio, L.A.'s first showcase of note for contemporary art. The following year Hopps and Kienholz opened the Ferus Gallery, which became one of the most influential art spaces in the country, the first place to host solo shows by Wallace Berman, Ed Moses, Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, Sonia Gechtoff, and Ed Ruscha, among others. It was there the world first saw the soup cans of Andy Warhol.

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Born in 1932, Walter Hopps grew up the son of a doctor in Eagle Rock, California. As part of a program to introduce high schoolers who were good in math and science to the arts, the teenage Hopps went on a field trip to the Hollywood Hills home of Walter and Louise Arensberg,

collectors and art patrons. As soon as he walked through the front door of their Mediterranean-style villa, it was as if he'd passed, he said, “through the looking glass.”

Art was everywhere, filling every inch of wall space. Marcel Duchamp's 1916 *Nude Descending a Staircase* hung near an actual staircase (the Arensbergs owned nineteen works by Duchamp, their close friend). Displayed in the kitchen, the coat closet, and even the bathroom were paintings—shocking for their time—by Magritte, Mondrian, de Chirico, Rousseau, Léger, Miró, and the Blue Four artists (Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Alexej von Jawlensky, and Paul Klee), whose work had been collected by Galka Scheyer, a German émigrée art dealer who had settled in Los Angeles in 1928. Displayed alongside work from the avant-garde were stunning Pre-Columbian stone and ceramic sculptures—Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (1924), next to an Aztec Corn Goddess, Salvador Dalí's 1936 *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)*, near an Olmec *Figure of a Man* and *Vessel in the Form of a Human Figure*. The Arensbergs also collected rare manuscripts and displayed a leaf from a 1462 Latin Bible next to Cézanne's *Still Life with Apples and a Glass of Wine*. “The house is invested with magic,” commented James Thrall Soby, a former director of MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture, on a visit to the Arensbergs in 1947. “The dense and eccentric displays break every museum rule—and give them a lasting place in the mind. Pictures stand belligerently close together, but they do not fight.”

To young Walter Hopps, the Arensberg home was his own version of Frances Hodgson Burnett's secret garden. He asked if he could visit again; the Arensbergs agreed. Thereafter Hopps made weekly visits, dropped off by an older friend with a driver's license. He spent Saturday afternoons in their library, homeschooling himself in art history, surrounded by and studying up close the works of Surrealists, Cubists, the sculpture of Brancusi, and especially the work of Duchamp, whose first career retrospective Hopps would mount at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963.

The 1950s, when Hopps became an adult, was a deeply conservative decade in many ways. In 1958 a candy

magnate named Robert Welch Jr. founded the John Birch Society, one of the most influential fringe groups in American history. Welch was an anti-civil-rights anti-globalist who saw Communists everywhere, even in the person of General and President Dwight Eisenhower. He believed fluoride in the water was a Communist plot. Modern art was corrosive, causing moral havoc even in the country's western-most and, in many ways, most liberal state. A few years earlier, when curator James Byrnes was offered the opportunity to purchase a small Jackson Pollock painting for \$400, trustees at the County Museum tried to block the purchase. They relented only on the proviso that the painting stay in the curator's office and be brought out only for “educational purposes.”

In 1957 Hopps and Ed Kienholz founded the Ferus Gallery, which was more like an artist-cooperative, in the heart of the commercial gallery scene on La Cienega Boulevard. There they presented a new generation of West Coast artists. Ed Ruscha recalled the gallery's “electricity and vitality,” qualities “that were lacking elsewhere.” In addition to enjoying the famous Southern California sun, artists were forging their own daring ways of working while also enjoying a certain lightness in their relationship to the European canon, gaining freedom by virtue of geographical distance. “What I've always liked about L.A.,” Robert Irwin told Lawrence Weschler, “is that it's one of the least restrictive towns in the world. When New Yorkers tell me what's wrong with L.A., everything they think is wrong—no tradition, no history, no core—is what makes it such a great place to do art and to build ideas about culture. In New York it's like an echo chamber: its overwhelming sense of itself, its past, its mission, becomes utterly restricting.”

Once Hopps had established the gallery, he needed an audience interested in collecting this challenging new art. To that end, he conducted Friday night talks in the gallery. With the help of his wife Shirley (a UCLA art history grad student whom he married in a ceremony at the Watts Towers) and future museum director Henry Hopkins, the talks grew into a series of classes at UCLA's continuing education program. When the university ran out of classroom space, they offered free enrollment to students who opened their homes for extension classes.



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Robert Irwin and Jacque Crist, 1986, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Hopps took his roadshow to the west-side mansions of his wealthy students—like Marcia and Fred Weisman, Betty and Monte Factor, and Betty Asher—people who’d been both mystified and fascinated by the art they saw at Ferus. He’d set up his slide projector in their living rooms and lecture on the gospel of contemporary art to this circle of budding collectors. Ultimately the group morphed from a class of hobbyists into a close-knit clique for whom art collecting became, as Monte Factor put it, “a way of life.”

Meanwhile, twenty-five miles east of L.A.’s west side, lay Pasadena, where eastern gentry like the Wrigleys of chewing-gum fame once spent mild winters amidst the fragrance of orange groves. By the late 1960s, the city still had its wealthy locals, with their Valley Hunt Club and oversized mansions, but the old downtown had the feeling of a ghost town. Among its shuttered storefronts, cheap diners, and pawn shops, however, were affordable studios that young artists rented, small places in spacious old brick office buildings, rundown hotels, and what was once the old Pasadena Library. “In those days,” as Peter Plagens wrote, “Pasadena was the local art world’s second city within the national art world’s second city.” Plagens split a 3,500-square-foot loft with Walter Gabrielson on the corner of Fair Oaks and Union. Bruce Nauman had the top floor a few doors west. Other artists working there at the time included Shiro Ikegawa, Karen Carson, Peter Lodato, Scott Grieger, Helen Pashgian, and Charles White, who had a studio in the old Green Hotel. And the cultural nexus for this underground art community was the Pasadena Art Museum.

The museum had been founded in 1922 as the Pasadena Art Institute, with a focus on nineteenth-century American and European art. It was located in a wooded area called Carmelita Park, which had the distinction of being the only public park in the United States laid out by the great Scottish-born naturalist John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club.

In 1945, the Pasadena Art Institute moved into a Chinese-inspired, tile-gabled villa on North Los Robles Avenue that had once served as a gallery and emporium for Asian and Native American crafts. In 1953, the institute was transformed once more when it received a bequest of six

hundred works from the estate of Galka Scheyer, including her world-class collection of paintings by the Blue Four. The following year it was christened the Pasadena Art Museum, with a focus on modernism.

Soon after he founded Ferus in 1957, Walter Hopps was invited by Pasadena Art Museum director Tom Leavitt to work with him as a curator. From that point onward, the Pasadena Art Museum began to amass and exhibit a significant collection of contemporary West Coast artists. Hopps assumed the role of director in 1962, when Tom Leavitt resigned. He was then, at thirty, the youngest museum director in the country, with a reputation as a maddeningly eccentric advocate for cutting-edge art, a man who moved to his own beat and sometimes could simply not be found (during his tenure at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., the staff made lapel buttons that read, “Walter Hopps will be here in 20 minutes”). Hopps was a self-taught curator and a notoriously bad administrator. He hated bureaucracies. Ed Moses revealed after Hopps’s death that “all Walter’s papers at the Pasadena Art Museum were kept under the carpet. When he left there, he didn’t let anybody know. Years later, when they rolled up this giant carpet, they found them.”

Hopps’s presence at the museum added an extra frisson for the artists living in the area. Sculptor Lloyd Hamrol (who is also my husband) rented, for \$75 a month, a 5,000-square-foot live/work space in a former office building built in 1886 with his then-partner Judy Gerowitz, soon to become Judy Chicago, an influential figure in the feminist art movement. Hamrol recalls the creative energy swelling the art scene in the ’60s and how Hopps “provided anchorage and support for those of us working on that northeast fringe of the megalopolis.” Many local artists could at long last see firsthand modern and contemporary art that otherwise they could only view in reproductions.

At the Pasadena Art Museum, Hopps mounted a seminal show of the German artist Kurt Schwitters, whose pioneering multidisciplinary art was considered “degenerate” by the Nazis; the first museum exhibition of the exquisite box assemblages of Joseph Cornell; and, as Hopps had vowed to do as a teenager, the first retrospective for the



unclassifiable Marcel Duchamp, whose found-object art had been shocking tradition-minded viewers since the 1913 Armory Show. At the gala Duchamp opening, many local art patrons were outraged at the presence of a porcelain urinal—one of Duchamp’s famous “ready-mades”—on display in their beloved institution, thus bearing out the Duchampian idea that each work of art was not complete until the audience experienced it. The effect of the Duchamp retrospective on local artists was, according to Peter Plagens, “nothing less than tectonic-plate moving.”

Throughout his tenure in Pasadena, Hopps connected early twentieth-century avant-gardists with incendiary new work from artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Serra, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol. A standoff developed, however, between museum trustees and the sensibilities of the curators and the artists, as well as members of the more conservative Pasadena community. When the artist George Herms included an American flag in one of his works for a collage show, a self-described “patriot” broke into the museum at night and destroyed the piece.

Outside of Pasadena the museum and gallery world in Los Angeles was as racially stratified as the city itself; artists of color were rarely exhibited in the commercial galleries on La Cienega Boulevard, by LACMA, or even, as far as I can tell, at the Pasadena Art Museum. In 1965, the same year that the city celebrated the opening of LACMA on Wilshire Boulevard, the predominantly Black neighborhood of Watts erupted in spasms of urban violence—sparked by years of police harassment and mistreatment.

In the wake of the Watts uprising, artist Noah Purifoy and a musician friend, Judson Powell, began collecting scraps from the destruction’s plentiful refuse. Charred books, a blackened Bible, twisted shopping carts. Using melted signs and pieces of burnt wood infused with glass, they turned rubble into art. Purifoy’s approach to discarded materials inspired other Black artists, like Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, and David Hammons, who sorted through the detritus to create startling works of assemblage art, all under the penumbra of Simon Rodia’s inspiring feat of social sculpture, the Watts Towers. As historian Kellie Jones notes in her 2017 study, *South*

*of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*, after the Watts rebellion, storefront space was easy to come by. A number of the artists who opened studios there came together to form the Black Artists Association, developing their own support systems, which included showing their work in churches and private homes. By 1967 Brockman Gallery, the first major showplace run by and for Black artists, was founded by brothers Alonzo and Dale Davis in the city’s Leimert Park neighborhood. Curator Franklin Sirmans draws a connection between the work of these seminal African American artists and Walter Hopps’s 1962 exhibit of Kurt Schwitters: “The discussion of modern and contemporary assemblage in California grew straight out of the context of Dada and surrealism, and Hopps was a catalyst.”

As early as 1958, the trustees of the Pasadena Art Museum (particularly a local socialite named Eudora Moore, for whom this quest became a consuming passion) lobbied to move the collection out of its dilapidated quarters on Los Robles Avenue into a new building in Carmelita Park, where the museum had been originally located in the 1910s and ’20s. Hopps was not at all in favor of the move. He liked showing art in the former Chinese emporium and wanted to stay there. He proposed the museum be extended by purchasing the adjacent parking lot and acquiring two nearby rundown brick hotels. The board, however, insisted on a new building in the old location.

Hopps hoped that at least the trustees would engage one of Southern California’s brilliant architects, such as Richard Neutra, John Lautner, Charles Eames, or Craig Ellwood, to design the new building. Instead they first hired Edward Durrell Stone, whose proposal, Hopps complained, “was a piece of crap.” Hopps convinced board president Harold Jurgensen, a grocery-store magnate, to fire Stone. Jurgensen did, but then awarded the commission to Thornton Ladd, whose main recommendation came from his mother, a museum’s board member. When Hopps first viewed Ladd’s plan, he felt “totally fucked and betrayed. The building was grotesque, and I was unable to get a word in edgewise to stem the tide of praise.” (Local artists referred to it as the “Melmac building,” after molded plastic dinnerware, the kind that wouldn’t break if you threw it against the wall.)

Jurgensen was replaced as board president in 1963 by Robert Rowan, a trustee and collector. Born to wealth, Rowan lacked basic business skills, hated arguments, feared bad publicity, and was known to put off making decisions. He was ill suited to lead a museum in a time of financial trouble. During his tenure, the museum cycled through four directors, none of whom stayed more than two years. One of them, John Coplans, an artist and art critic, wrote an instructive and bitter essay, “Diary of a Disaster,” which analyzed the steps that led to the museum’s collapse. He highlighted the “constant tug-of-war ... a process of proposal, counterproposal and compromise” between the trustees and the senior staff, and he exposed how some trustees had leveraged the museum’s collections to raise the price of their own holdings.

Walter Hopps himself never made it to a critical board meeting in 1966, where the final plans and model for Ladd’s new building were to be discussed. Unable to sleep for days, he was splitting up with his wife and emotionally drained from long-term tension with the trustees. He’d been struggling with drug addiction ever since he’d taken speed to get through a day job in a bioscience lab.

Hopps flew back to Los Angeles from New York, planning to rush to Pasadena for the all-important meeting. He made it only as far as the baggage claim at LAX, where he suffered a psychotic break. A month later, when he got out of the hospital, still suffering the shakes, Robert Rowan demanded his resignation. He thus fired the man who, as Coplans noted, “had virtually single-handedly lifted the little museum into international prominence.” Post-resignation, Hopps managed to install the Joseph Cornell show as his final exhibition. Though the reclusive Cornell did not attend the opening, he eventually came west to see it, writing to Hopps to laud him for his innovative installation, noting the care he had taken to install reflective strips to bounce light up into Cornell’s magical boxes like footlights in a theater.

In 1969, the Pasadena Art Museum opened its new building. The first guest curator was Alan Solomon, former director of the Jewish Museum in New York, tasked by museum trustees to curate a survey show of postwar American art. Solomon’s interpretation of his

assignment was a show called *Painting in New York, 1944-1959*. To exclude California artists in its inaugural exhibition was an ominous statement from a museum that had long championed their work. To the local art community, it was a slap in the face. Only after Coplans, then acting as a caretaker director, protested furiously to the executive committee did the trustees grant him \$5,000, to mount a small grouping of artists who had “made the West Coast significant in contemporary culture.”

Curators experienced other issues. “With its bizarre space and curved walls, the design resisted sane installations,” Coplans notes. It was also a punch list of headaches. The loading dock was built so low that a semi-trailer could not back up to unload. John Muir’s original and sensitive park design was obliterated. As the museum lurched forward, it hovered on the edge of financial ruin. To maintain security for art now spread over a much larger footprint, a platoon of seventeen guards was needed, ballooning the budget, as their salaries had to be paid before monies went out to office, curatorial, and educational staff. Exhibitions were getting more expensive to mount. In order to keep the museum afloat, its executive committee approved the sale of some of its artwork, including the museum’s prized Galka Scheyer collection (they didn’t succeed). There was no endowment. By all accounts, the museum had expanded too quickly. Disaster was on the horizon.

Finally, hat in hand, the board of the museum appealed to industrialist Norton Simon to bail them out. For Simon, who had resigned from the LACMA board in 1971 to focus on finding a home for his own collection, this provided the perfect opportunity. He’d become a shrewd and discerning buyer, who had leveraged his fast-appreciating collection of Impressionists into an astounding collection of Old Master paintings that were undervalued in the early ’60s. He had works by Botticelli, Rembrandt, Raphael, and Ingres as well as Manets, Gauguins, Renoirs, Matisse, and Van Gogh.

Unlike his sister, noted art collector Marcia Simon Weisman, Norton Simon was no fan of contemporary art. Gallerist Rosamund Felsen (then married to Sidney B. Felsen, co-founder of the fine art printmaking workshop,



Gemini G.E.L.) recalled attending a dinner party at the Beverly Hills home of Fred and Marcia Weisman. During cocktail hour the Felsens found themselves alone in the dining room with Norton Simon, who was gazing at Jasper Johns's encaustic painting *Map*. Rosamund Felsen gamely tried to engage him in conversation about it. As she recounts, Simon had absolutely no interest in the painting whatsoever. Later she mentioned the incident to Marcia Weisman. "Marcia told me, 'never, ever talk to Norton about art that was made after World War I.'"

In or around the year 1973 America's post-WWII expansion came to an end. We experienced an oil crisis, a stock-market crash, and an ensuing recession. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 2.3 million jobs were lost, a postwar record. In 1974, after fifty years, the Pasadena Art Museum closed. The following year it reopened in the same Thornton Ladd building with a new name and a new identity—the Norton Simon Museum of Art. Depending on whom you talked to, Simon had either "stolen" or "rescued" the Pasadena Art Museum by taking it over and installing his personal collection, which, in 1999, was valued at \$1 billion. Meanwhile, the works of contemporary L.A. artists, like George Herms and Wallace Berman, were consigned to the basement to collect dust. In John Coplans's damning summation: "In the end, three tired old men were allowed to hand the museum over to a strong man. To the public at large they were saving a great public institution. But, in fact, they were saving face, hiding their own failures and attempting to save their reputations as cultural leaders." Robert Irwin summarized the city at this time as "artist-rich, institution poor." Critic Peter Frank wrote that the L.A. art scene had "crept into this decade like a mugging victim: battered, impoverished, scared, and disgusted."

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In 1979, a headline in the art section of the *Los Angeles Times* caught the eye of Sherri Geldin, then a UCLA graduate student in arts management. Geldin had been searching for a museum job, and the prospects were not promising. She was able to get an interview with LACMA curator Stephanie Barron only to learn that the museum was not hiring, and furthermore, that—apart from Stephanie and her small team—LACMA (at the time) was not invested in acquiring modern, let alone contemporary,

art. The *L.A. Times* article, "In Quest of L.A. Home for Modern Art" by Barbara Isenberg, revealed that Mayor Tom Bradley was leading a community quest to establish "a Los Angeles-based modern art museum."

Raised in South Central, Bradley was the city's first African American mayor. He'd been a star athlete at UCLA and later worked as a community-relations officer on the west side for the Los Angeles Police Department. He'd also put in years as a liberal political activist. Bradley's political success hinged not on the powerful state party machine but on a reform-minded wing that was home to a large number of Jewish west-side liberals. New alliances were forged in the wake of a June 1967 anti-war rally at the Century Plaza Hotel, where members of the LAPD attacked 15,000 protesters, most of whom were white and middle class. I can testify: I saw the swinging batons and the blood when a friend's mother, a Beverly Hills matron, was struck on the head by a policeman's baton during the protest. As historian Jon Wiener writes in *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties*, "white liberals on the west side had suddenly experienced firsthand the brutality of the LAPD that Blacks had been protesting against for years." Thus it was that a coalition of Blacks and Jews allowed Bradley to claim City Hall on his second try, in 1973.

Geldin recognized many of the names on the mayor's committee, famous art patrons like Marcia Simon Weisman and Robert Rowan, the former board chairman of the Pasadena Art Museum who had fired Hopps. She'd never heard, though, of William Norris, the lawyer whom the mayor had appointed as committee chairman. One of the mayor's earliest advocates, Norris knew Bradley from Democratic fundraising circles. Norris's then-wife, Merry Norris, was an art consultant and contemporary-art lover who was among many grieving the loss of the Pasadena Art Museum. "She looked at me earnestly," Norris later wrote, "and asked, 'Why don't you do something about it?'" I could not believe that she was seriously expecting me, with little money and knowing very little about art to boot, to undertake a movement to establish a new art museum. But it turned out that she was serious."

One of Bill Norris's canny moves was to join in common purpose two of the city's geographically and socially

distant collecting communities—the more conservative and WASPish Pasadena art patrons and L.A.'s mostly Jewish, liberal west side. The Weismans, along with five other key local collectors, signed a pledge to donate chunks of their private collections, worth up to \$6 million each, "to create a museum of standing and repute." Geldin shot off a query to Norris about future employment at this hypothetical art museum and was startled by a quick response, a phone call from Norris himself. He invited her to his office to talk. (Norris always maintained it was a "fantastic letter.")

Geldin felt overwhelmed as she drove downtown in her little car to meet Bill Norris in his corner office at Tuttle & Taylor, an old-line law firm. They talked for an hour. Norris explained how the mayor's committee had come about at a fundraising dinner for City Councilman Joel Wachs. Marcia Simon Weisman had advised Wachs that she would attend only if he seated her next to Mayor Bradley. She used the dinner hour to persuade the mayor that L.A.'s lack of a proper modern art museum was a glaring void in the cultural life of the city. Important art collections like her own, she warned, might well be lost to Los Angeles, instead donated to museums in New York or San Francisco.

Bill Norris was impressed with Geldin's writing, her knowledge of art history, and her savvy about arts management. At the conclusion of their talk, he invited her to join the committee, while also cautioning her that the museum might never materialize. "We had no staff and no money for staff," Geldin says. "We had no home for art and no art. And we had no institution, non-profit or otherwise." She realized this appointment was "kinda crazy." She was young and inexperienced. She was also thrilled, and she signed on. Norris asked Marcia Weisman to cover Geldin's modest salary (Geldin remembers Weisman calling her husband Fred on a payphone to get an okay for the money), making Sherri Geldin MOCA's first hire.

Norris set up a spare desk for Geldin down the hall from his own office, offering the use of supplies, phone, typewriter, and copy machine. He asked her to start researching funding sources as well as what kind of staff the museum would require. What kind of collection?

Where, in the far-flung city, would the museum be located? And then there was the question of who would have a say in this new museum's governance, its mission, its policies.

Marcia Weisman, friend and champion of local artists, had strong feelings on these subjects. When the Pasadena Art Museum became the Norton Simon Museum, Marcia and her then-husband Fred (their joint collection would later be sundered by an acrimonious divorce) had tried to start something in its place, going so far as to have architect Frank Gehry draw up plans for renovating the old Pan-Pacific Auditorium in the Fairfax District. The Weismans also helped find rent-free space for the Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art (LAICA), an artist-run institution that had suffered financial and administrative woes. Now, as the catalytic force behind the mayor's committee, Marcia Weisman was determined that L.A. artists have a say in the planning the new museum.

To jumpstart the process, Weisman convened a large gathering of artists at her Beverly Hills home on August 8, 1979, to hear Bill Norris discuss the creation of an Artists Advisory Council. Sherri Geldin remembers gazing in awe at the couple's legendary art collection, which included paintings by Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, and Pablo Picasso. There was also the stunning *Map* by Jasper Johns, a work she'd only seen, until that moment, "real small in art history books or on bad slides."

Among those invited to the Weismans that night were artists Robert Graham, Ed Moses, Sam Francis, Billy Al Bengston, DeWain Valentine, Alexis Smith, Vija Celmins, and Lita Albuquerque. "You could tell there were little factions," Geldin remembers, "but everyone respected Marcia. She was the life force in pulling that committee together." Robert Irwin was also at that first meeting, standing in the back of the room "asking all the right questions," as Calvin Tomkins noted in a 1981 *New Yorker* essay.

A week later, DeWain Valentine called another meeting, to which seventy-five artists showed up. A contentious discussion ensued; there was a lot of shouting about the



roles artists might play in the design and even the construction of the building, revealing a mash-up of competing priorities. Equally fractious meetings were convened at the Brentwood home of Stanley and Elyse Grinstein, two collectors known for connecting L.A. artists with international art stars at parties where you'd end up dancing to Motown blaring from a jukebox into the wee hours of the night.

After several such discouraging wrangles, Robert Irwin considered quitting. Instead, he decided to call every member of the council with a clear message: Get. It. Together. If artists were to have a say in planning the museum, he told them, they would have to present a united front. "After that," he told Calvin Tomkins, "we sat down, buried our axes, and decided what we would have to do."

The Artists Advisory Council finally stabilized at about sixteen men and women: DeWain Valentine, Sam Francis, Lita Albuquerque, Peter Alexander, Karen Carson, Vija Celmins, Guy Dill, Fred Eversley, Robert Heineken, Robert Irwin, Gary Lloyd, Peter Lodato, Joe Ray, Roland Reiss, Alexis Smith, and Tom Wudl. They continued to meet once a month for the next two and a half years to study and discuss the raft of issues involved in planning a new museum, including recommendations for the director and the museum's location. After that, they decided, they would disband and turn it over to museum professionals. "The fact that they have maintained a united front," Tomkins noted in 1981, "is an indication of how much the museum means to Los Angeles artists."

That Sam Francis and Robert Irwin were designated as founding board members led Calvin Tomkins to wryly observe, "to most museum trustees, inviting an artist to serve on the board is like inviting a camel into the tent." The artists' appointments were, as Geldin observes, "a clarion call that the museum was going to differ from other museums in a most significant way." Francis and Irwin, both of whom had a strong sense of their position in the world as artists, each played a decisive role as the board wrestled with choosing the museum's first director.

Francis argued that it would be a coup if the board could convince his friend Pontus Hultén, then director of Centre

Georges Pompidou in Paris, to take the job. Hultén's appointment would instantly add credibility and international luster to the project. Because most European museums are state run, there were a few concerns as to whether a European would know how to fundraise and govern at an American museum. Bob Irwin suggested that they hire, simultaneously, a director and a deputy director. "You should go after the director at the Hudson River Museum," he urged, "that guy who's been, like, just killing it everywhere he goes."

Recommendations from the Artists Advisory Council were, remarkably, the same as those from the Directors Search Committee. Two names—Pontus Hultén and Richard Koshalek—topped both lists. A European superstar and an American up-and-comer.

Hultén was one of the best-known museum directors of his time and enjoyed close friendships with many artists, including Jean Tinguely, Claes Oldenburg, and Niki de Saint Phalle. During Hultén's fifteen years as the director of Stockholm's Moderna Museet, that museum became one of Europe's most dynamic contemporary arts institutions, bridging the gap between Europe and America by showing the work of young American painters like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as the first European survey of Pop Art (though he also turned down a proposed bequest from the estate of the visionary Swedish visionary artist, Hilma af Klint, dismissing her work as that of a "spiritualist").

Koshalek had never met Hultén, though he was well aware of his stature in the museum world—"you couldn't avoid it," he says. At the Pompidou, which opened in 1977, Hultén organized large-scale exhibitions like *Paris-Berlin*, *Paris-New York*, looking at how art history was forged through exchanges and links between artistic capitals. He'd re-created Gertrude Stein's salon as part of another exhibit, and his shows attracted a vast new public, many of them making their first visit to a museum. He was the darling of curators and critics. Conveniently, Hultén's Pompidou contract was up for renewal in 1981. The artist Niki de Saint Phalle, who worked closely with Hultén on several immense sculptural commissions, once said of him, "[he has] the soul of an artist, not of a museum director." Her compliment would prove

both prophetic and highly problematic for what was to become The Museum of Contemporary Art.

And so Koshalek queried Martin Friedman a third time: "Should I take the job in L.A.?" Friedman told him, "This time I'm going to get it right. I think you should take the job. But I'm only saying that because that's what you're going to do. You shouldn't, really— because if you look at the history of LACMA and the number of directors they went through and how the Pasadena Art Museum went through every major director in the country—you do know that history, right?"

Koshalek was well aware of the city's sketchy history in terms of supporting a modern art museum. He'd come out to California frequently over the years, to see LACMA shows like *Experiments in Art and Technology* (1971), or to exchange ideas with Walter Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum. He knew that LACMA, as he put it, "had some kind of generic fear factor with regard to contemporary art." But he'd also worked with California artists over the years. He wanted to live in California, to be close to the artist community here. He was young, just turned thirty-nine; he wanted to take the risk.

The museum trustees flew both candidates to Los Angeles, Hultén from Paris, Koshalek from New York. At a dinner hosted by trustees Eli Broad, Marcia Weisman, Sam Francis, Bob Irwin, and Max Palevsky, lively conversation flowed late into the balmy evening. Afterwards Hultén and Koshalek went out for a nightcap and shared a mutual realization: "We never, ever talked about the museum, about what they wanted," Koshalek says. "We talked about their houses in Malibu, their lifestyle." Hultén was dumbfounded, he recalls. "Then we both flew back to our respective homes."

A few weeks later, Koshalek, Hultén, and board member Sam Francis met in a private room at the Sky Club, the fabled aerie on the sixty-fifth floor of the Pan Am Building, where diners enjoyed a spectacular view of Manhattan spread out below them. It was a scene from *Mad Men*—white tablecloths, martinis, steak knives, a rotary telephone (on which Eli Broad joined the meeting from L.A.). Hultén had arrived without a tie; the restaurant lent him one. "It cost me a fortune," Koshalek recalls

with a laugh, "because Pontus walked out the door with the tie and I had to pay for it."

Sam Francis began the meeting by announcing that the trustees wanted both men to helm the new museum. There was, however, one crucial question on which this offer hinged: "Can you two work together?"

Francis left the room so Hultén and Koshalek could speak alone. For an hour and a half they discussed where the new museum should be and what it should be. Koshalek stayed focused on his core belief that the museum "doesn't exist primarily for attendance, it exists for the artist. All decisions have to come from the fact that we're involved with living artists. The museum needs to provide what the artists need to accomplish their work. And if we do well for the artist, the audience will follow, and the public will get what they should get, which is to see the very best work possible from those artists."

It was reassuring, promising even, that Hultén shared similar connections to artists and similar beliefs about their primacy in any art institution. Next question: who would be the director and who would be the deputy director? Koshalek deferred to Hultén, the senior figure. "So Pontus said, 'I'll be the director and you, Richard, will be the deputy director and chief curator.'"

This division of labor sounded right. Koshalek did not want to deal with the administration or with the fundraising. "I wanted to deal with the artists and the creative side. The exhibitions and the catalogues. I thought I had the perfect system. I thought I had it figured out."

Sam Francis rejoined the men and they dialed Eli Broad in Los Angeles. Hultén and Koshalek told him: "We can work together."



## PART II: HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

In late 1980 Richard Koshalek arrived in Los Angeles as chief curator and deputy director of a museum that did not yet exist. Skirmishes, standoffs, delays, and awkwardness of various kinds would test him over the next months and years. Improvisation and pivots were the order of the day. And yet ... “There was a momentum at MOCA from day one,” he says. “Keep moving forward. Pushing forward. If you make mistakes, that’s okay, just keep pushing on. If you hit a wall, re-imagine, re-imagine, and just keep moving.”

They began working out of what Sherri Geldin calls “those dreadful offices on Grand Avenue,” downstairs from a law firm, with a staff of three, \$50,000 in the bank, no home, no collection, and no consensus among the board members on what the museum should be. Everything had to happen at once. The *where* of the new museum had been determined before Koshalek arrived, the result of an extraordinary deal brokered by the Mayor’s Advisory Committee and the Community Redevelopment Agency, the CRA. That same June 1979 newspaper article by Barbara Isenberg that had caught Sherri Geldin’s attention—about the mayor’s backing of a new art museum—sparked a wave of excitement at the offices of the CRA. Acting administrator Donald W. Cosgrove hurried off a note to Bill Norris, writing “the Agency supports your statement, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, that ‘the lack of a modern art museum in Los Angeles is a glaring void in our cultural life.’” Not long after, Norris, Marcia Weisman, and Sherri Geldin gathered around a table in a downtown office as Cosgrove and his colleague Ed Helfeld unfurled a set of plans.

“I’ll never forget it,” Geldin recalls, “it was shocking. We were being offered the last unbuilt parcel on Bunker Hill.” The parcel was close to eleven acres and was part of a larger redevelopment plan called California Plaza, which was to include two unique skyscrapers to be designed by Arthur Erickson, a project that would eventually take ten years to complete. “They’d drawn a plot plan: an office building here, a hotel there, over there would be residential. And in the middle was this block simply marked ‘culture.’”

Bill Norris had been expecting the CRA to offer an old downtown building, one that could be retrofitted. “Instead,” he writes, “they pulled out preliminary plans for Bunker Hill that included an unspecified cultural institution. At that moment, I realized we had a museum within our grasp.” Under the city’s art ordinance, builders were required to put one and a half percent of their project cost into works of art for the public. The cost of the fifty-two story California Plaza project was estimated at approximately a billion dollars; the CRA proposed to spend all its art funding, \$22 million, on The Museum of Contemporary Art.

The deal was that the developer would fund the physical building, and MOCA would establish a collection and also raise a founding endowment of \$10 million, so that once they opened the museum on Grand Avenue, they’d have funds to operate it. They had little over a year to meet the deadline. Though the deal was a pressure cooker, it was also so extraordinarily generous that art critic Robert Hughes, in *Time* magazine, called it “unique in the civic relations of American museums.”

In the meantime Koshalek recruited curator Julia Brown, whom he’d worked with at the National Endowment for the Arts and then at the Hudson River Museum. New to Los Angeles, Brown determined her first order of business would be to drive around the city and visit artists, writers, designers, and architects in their studios. She met with Robert Therrien, Jo Ann Callis, William Brice, Allen Ruppersberg, Betye Saar, Michael Asher, and Mary Corse, among others. Then Brown began sketching out ideas for the museum’s first exhibitions, catalogues, and other projects. “We were a small group of people in those little rented offices,” Brown recalls, “trying to give birth to this new institution, figuring out what exhibition space there could be, building support, creating a vision, and raising money, all at once. It was an exciting period. It was also a very, very difficult birth.”

Koshalek also hired Julie Lazar, who, as development director at the Hudson River Museum, had produced wildly original interdisciplinary performance events that helped build that institution’s reputation. Lazar had studied and worked among a group of artists in performance, dance, architecture, and conceptual-art circles who were cross-pollinating forms. She was particularly fascinated

by a possible collaboration between a choreographer and an architect. Within a month the board approved Lazar’s project, and she invited Lucinda Childs, choreographer for *Einstein on the Beach* (director Robert Wilson’s groundbreaking merging of theater art, opera, and dance) to work on a MOCA project with an architect of her choosing.

Childs chose Frank Gehry, best known in those pre-Bilbao days for his inventive use of industrial and utilitarian materials. The two artists had not met, but they shared an interest in working with light and a respect for the principles of Minimalism, though Childs tended toward a choreographic grid—movement on strict diagonals—while Gehry’s structures were expressionistic, intuitive, and sculptural. What kind of performance might materialize from their combined sensibilities? When Gehry came to New York, Childs danced privately for him for an hour in her studio. Gehry later described it as “one of the most unforgettable experiences of my life.”

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It would take nine months before Pontus Hultén could extricate himself from his life in Paris to join the team in Los Angeles. In the interim, he conferred regularly with Koshalek, and both made several trips to meet in person. Hultén grew to like Los Angeles. “It has a very nice ocean,” he told Eli Broad. On one Paris sojourn, over apéros at Hultén’s table at Brasserie Lipp, Koshalek caught a worrisome preview of Hultén’s management style. “You have to understand,” Hultén confided, “I’m like Charles de Gaulle. The staff should anticipate what my needs are. I should not have to tell them.”

Money issues of course loomed from the start. While board members Eli Broad and Max Palevsky had each pledged \$1 million, the need to raise the requisite \$10 million total for the museum’s endowment became urgent. The trustees were counting on Hultén to lead the charge. On another Paris visit, Koshalek explained to him the need to raise money as quickly as possible. “I brought a list of twenty-five potential patrons. We had asked each of them to become a founder of MOCA at a minimum of \$10,000 paid out over four years, and then also throw a cocktail party and invite twenty-five of their friends.” It was a way to raise money without incurring debt.

Hultén was taken aback. At the first dinner in Los Angeles, he recalled, he had been told he did not have to worry about money, that he was among men of “deep pockets.” Hultén’s concept of what a cultural institution should be was based on an Old World model that most certainly did not include going to parties to ask for monetary support. And, if Hultén was mistaken or had been misled as to his own role in fundraising, the trustees understanding of Hultén’s role at the Pompidou was off-point as well. Hultén was a curator, and a brilliant one. But at the Centre Pompidou it was not the director but the president who dealt with the government, with fundraising, and with the Board of Trustees. Truth be known, Hultén hated the whole idea of trustees.

“How many people would attend these parties?” Hultén asked. “About a hundred,” he was told. “No,” he said. “I’m not a cocktail director. I never talk to more than six people at a time. I’m not going to do it.”

After several tense in-person meetings (“like being bitten by ducks,” said Hultén), MOCA’s trustees finally persuaded him to attend the parties. For the next year, two or three times a week, Koshalek, trustee Fred Nicholas, and, when he was in town, Hultén visited what seemed to Koshalek like “every house in Pasadena and Beverly Hills and Malibu and Orange County.” Hultén would say a few words, then step aside for Koshalek or Nicholas to make the pitch. Since there was nothing yet to display of MOCA’s accomplishments—no collection, no building, no programs, and no track record of fundraising—they showed slides of exhibitions from other museums around the world that inspired them.

A substantial volunteer effort to raise funds was led by Betye Burton and Merry Norris. Norris recruited Lenore S. Greenberg, an L.A. native who had taken an art-history class at Wellesley College designed by Alfred Barr, MoMA’s legendary first director. Greenberg’s parents, Rita and Taft Schreiber (a chief executive at the Music Corporation of America), were notable art collectors. Initially, their acquisitions were guided by their friend actor Charles Laughton; then, in the 1950s, they began to collect contemporary art, purchasing seminal works by Piet Mondrian, Alberto Giacometti, Jean Dubuffet, and others. At a time when many collectors



worried whether the blue in their drapes matched the blue in their Cézanne, the Schreibers hung Jackson Pollock’s *Number 1, 1949*—an enormous, explosively exuberant drip painting—over their living-room sofa. It was a bold statement. As the artist Allan Kaprow described it, “the painting offered no familiarity with one’s everyday world of convention and habit.” Instead, it was “a painting that continued on out into the room.”

As the board debated the choice of an architect for the museum on Grand Avenue, meetings grew rancorous. A majority wanted to hire Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, a choice heartily contested by Max Palevsky, head of the architecture committee. Palevsky was eventually ousted from the committee—though not before he ousted Koshalek. When trustee Fred Nicholas was put in charge of architecture planning (bringing Koshalek back onto the committee), Palevsky sued for breach of contract. He wanted to take back his \$1 million MOCA pledge, arguing that it was based on a commitment by a leading trustee that Palevsky would head the architecture committee. In response, MOCA countersued Palevsky for the remainder of his pledge. The lawsuit was the subject of several articles in the art press, some of which quoted trustees, leading to rumors of a mole. (Deep Throat has not been revealed to this day.) The controversy shook the public’s confidence that the new museum could get itself launched with a cohesive board, staff, and leadership. One former MOCA staffer described this particular episode as extended “hand-to-hand combat,” with Fred Nicholas as the key peacemaker and negotiator.

Betye Burton, one of the seven founding board members and among the most generous, ascribes part of the turmoil of MOCA’s early years to the volatile mix of powerful men. “I was the token woman,” she notes. “I was there only because they needed a woman. And I’d say such and such—and nobody paid any attention to me. Then they’d do something a little later on and I’d have to say, ‘Well, that’s what I just suggested half an hour ago.’” Burton recalled that her male counterparts were very knowledgeable, but each one seemed to harbor a personal agenda. “Some of them were thinking more about the museum and less about their personal gains from it, and some were thinking more about their personal gains and less about the museum. That’s the best I can explain it.”

Lenore Greenberg had long been interested in museums and their governance. When she was invited to join the board in 1981, she prepared by reading *The Good Old Modern*, Russell Lynes’s history of MoMA. “It convinced me of the mischief that board members could get into, what they could do to create problems for a museum,” she says. There was plenty potential mischief afloat at MOCA—some board members were claiming the right to hire staff, to dictate what the museum would do year by year, even week by week.

On several occasions during that period Koshalek, Hultén, and Sherri Geldin considering quitting MOCA entirely, to branch off and start another museum on their own. They secured initial funding (from philanthropist Ed Janss) and went so far as to scope out the Santa Fe Depot to the east of downtown as a potential space. Koshalek laid out the situation to several trustees—Betye Burton, Lenore Greenberg, Bill Kieschnick, Carl Hartnack, Morton Winston, and Fred Nicholas—who stepped up to prevent the implosion. They understood that if the nascent institution lost its directors and staff before it even opened, it was not going to be easy to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

ARCO CEO Bill Kieschnick was especially effective at defusing tension, memorably lecturing his fellow board members on the importance of keeping their responsibilities separate from those belonging to the staff. The board’s responsibilities did *not*, he told them, include hiring (or firing) staff, or determining what programs or exhibitions the curators would produce. Kieschnick also set a positive and collegial tone: “If somebody on the staff makes a mistake, we’re not going to take the attitude that we’re going to look for who shot John. We’re going to see it as one large institutional project. We’re going to solve it together.” Missteps were to be considered part of the process in a risk-taking institution. In 1986, on the occasion of Kieschnick assuming the role as MOCA board chairman, his predecessor, Eli Broad, lauded him: “Bill can work out a consensus with everyone loving him. I operate in a General Patton style and just charge ahead.”

In another bid to create civility and stability, and to lend the museum a global profile, Hultén and Koshalek brought new international trustees onto the board.

Pontus Hultén brought his friend Dominique de Menil, who had emigrated to the U.S. with her husband from Paris during the German occupation. The couple became major art patrons in Houston (where they were building their own art museum), as well as civil-rights leaders. “She respected people who had a creative contribution to make,” Koshalek says, “and the Los Angeles art community knew and respected her.”

Robert Irwin recruited his friend the Italian collector Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, whose family had made a fortune in real estate and wine, and who, with his wife Giovanna, amassed one of the world’s greatest collections of Minimalist painting, sculpture, and Conceptual Art. Koshalek and Hultén hoped that the addition of two esteemed international collectors might strengthen the overall board. Also invited to join were Peter Ludwig, a German industrialist, chocolate-factory owner, and fervent art collector, and Seiji Tsutsumi—recruited by Sam Francis—a politically progressive scion to a Japanese railway and grocery magnate, who also published poetry and other writings under the name Takashi Tsujii.

But what *kind* of art museum would MOCA be? There was still no consensus among the board. The museum had first been described to Koshalek as “a sort of West Coast version of The Museum of Modern Art,” that being the gold standard for many of the trustees. Some thought it should be a collecting museum only. Others felt that it should build a permanent collection but also host temporary exhibits. There were those, including Hultén, who thought it should feature painting and sculpture only, while others, including Koshalek, wanted it to embrace architecture, performance, design, film, and electronic media.

But first the board must be unified. Koshalek, an unapologetic “football freak,” fixed on a strategy from his favorite sport. He’d write a “playbook” for the museum, laying out the offensive and defensive positions and how they were going to play the game. Together with Marcy Goodwin, a museum-planning consultant suggested by Bob Irwin, the two sequestered themselves in a downtown conference room for weeks. They drafted a blueprint for the museum: its goals, its policies, its acquisition plans, and a proposed exhibition schedule, even

sketching out individual exhibitions. The comprehensive plan included installations “of painting, sculpture, photography, graphics, performance, concerts, films, and works in electronic media; the search for excellence would be international, with emerging talent as likely to be found in Asia, Australia, and South America as in the traditional American-European axis.” The playbook also proclaimed that the museum would be a center for work by California artists, especially.

Many shows that later came to fruition over the next decade were included in the playbook: individual shows for then-emerging artists like Alexis Smith; the first major retrospective on the visionary architect Louis Kahn (which became *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*); Walter Hopps’s idea for the *Automobile and Culture* show; a Barnett Newman retrospective; Pontus Hultén’s proposal for a retrospective of the Surrealist painter Dorothea Tanning and another for the American sculptor Richard Stankiewicz. Included also was Julie Lazar’s *Territory of Art* radio series featuring a cast of avant-garde theater, dance, and visual artists, composers, writers, and musicians, storytellers in adventurous collaborations—all produced with the L.A. driver in mind (though the series eventually reached listeners around the world). These proposals, explained the playbook, “will ultimately transform our museum from an idea into a living work.” And, importantly, the one-hundred-page bound book looked official and impressive.

Perhaps the playbook’s most radical concept was what Koshalek dubbed the Guerrilla Museum, later called the Transitional Museum. The Guerrilla Museum drew on Koshalek’s experiences at the Walker Art Museum, where he presented performing-arts events and exhibitions in churches and fire stations, parks, and department stores, as well as from the Warburton Avenue project in Westchester County. “I had this strong belief that the museum had to go beyond its four walls and had to engage the community, and especially downtown L.A.” The intention was to stage artists’ work in temporary sites before the formal building went up. It made clear that it was urgent for the museum to get going: to establish a presence, to start building an audience, to begin working with artists.



The spatial vastness of Los Angeles—a city characterized by upheaval and displacement—is notoriously difficult to comprehend, even for those of us who’ve lived here most of our lives. The most geo-anchoring features, like the towering San Gabriel Mountains to our east, can vanish—as they did on the smoggy days of my 1950s childhood, and as they did recently, in summer, with the smoke from multiple wildfires caused by climate change.

Threading the sprawling city together are great boulevards and freeways, which serve as a framework to separate and sometimes to contain, or even define, neighborhoods. The playbook delineated the exhibition space for its Guerrilla Museum as the territory within the set of four freeways—the Pasadena Freeway (State Route 110), the Golden State Freeway (Interstate 5), the Hollywood Freeway (U.S. Route 101), and the San Bernardino Freeway (Interstate 10)—that surround downtown. “That was our gallery. That was our museum,” Koshalek said.

The board agreed to adopt the playbook in the fall of 1981, also stipulating a timeline—the museum’s opening should occur sometime in 1984, to coincide with the L.A. Olympics. But by early 1982, it was clear that construction was not sailing along on schedule. Even though MOCA had raised \$14.5 million, surpassing its goal for the founding endowment, building delays were inevitable. The economy was in rough shape, with interest rates at 16 percent. It was imperative, Koshalek decided, to find an alternative temporary space that would be ready for exhibitions and performances when the Olympics and the Olympics Arts Festival finally arrived in Los Angeles.

Koshalek and Geldin spent days walking around downtown, searching for the right space. What they saw was discouraging. The CRA directed them to different buildings on Spring and Hill streets, but those spaces had small windows, low ceilings, little light, and columns that restricted sightlines.

Geldin recalls the fateful day, in late 1982, when Don Cosgrove from the CRA called her, beside himself with excitement. There was an entire block of abandoned buildings on Central Avenue in Little Tokyo. He urged her to come see them immediately. Geldin rushed over to

the location where, in the middle of the day, there were no pedestrians on the streets. A few unsheltered men and women slept on the grubby sidewalks. “Don unlocked a small door and—voilà!—we were inside Building 4. It reeked of urine. There were rats running around. But my immediate reaction was, wow. If this isn’t what Pontus and Richard are looking for, I don’t know what is.”

Building 4 was different from anything else they had seen, a raw warehouse space with great bones and natural light from soaring skylights. Dedicated in 1947 by A.C. Martin and Associates as a retail and warehouse space for the Union Hardware Company, the structure had been acquired by the city some years later for use as a police vehicle depot, and for storing supplies, including explosives. “It was a wreck and it clearly needed to be renovated,” Geldin says, “but it had all the right attributes. It was urban, but not in the middle of a lot of office towers. It was downtown.” She hurried back to the office to report. “Once Richard and Pontus saw it, it was full speed ahead.”

Since the building was going to be a temporary facility, Geldin and Koshalek figured the board would skip all the gyrations about naming rights, all the meticulous planning they knew would come with the permanent building up on Bunker Hill. “They kind of left us to our own devices,” Geldin says. Frank Gehry was the only architect Koshalek considered for the warehouse renovation. Gehry, however, was initially reluctant, viewing the offer as a “consolation prize” after being passed over by “the powers that be” when it came to the Bunker Hill commission, which had been awarded to Arata Isozaki.

“I’d never worked with Gehry before,” Koshalek says, “but I loved the kind of work that he did, using fugitive materials to create very relaxed spaces, structures that were highly accessible. There was no doubt in my mind that he had to be the one.” His persistence paid off. “When I decided to do it,” Gehry later told journalist Barbara Isenberg, “I took it as a real project, and what convinced me was Koshalek, because I thought he was sincere, and he really did make me feel they weren’t going to give it to anybody else. It was just me or nothing.”

**“THE INTENTION WAS TO STAGE ARTISTS’ WORK IN TEMPORARY SITES BEFORE THE FORMAL BUILDING WENT UP. IT MADE CLEAR THAT IT WAS URGENT FOR THE MUSEUM TO GET GOING: TO ESTABLISH A PRESENCE, TO START BUILDING AN AUDIENCE, TO BEGIN WORKING WITH ARTISTS.”**





Koshalek submitted a budget and proposal for the warehouse renovation to the MOCA board for review and approval. The reaction was swift.

Board chairman Eli Broad immediately declared his reluctance to move forward with the project and refused to allow the board to consider approving any funding. Nobody was going to come to a rundown part of downtown to see contemporary art in a warehouse, he argued. At a critical time when they were trying to raise money for the Bunker Hill building, Broad worried this could siphon off potential donors, even damage the reputation of the museum. Other board members shared his fears; most developers at the time were tearing down buildings, not re-using them. Several trustees, including Robert Rowan, who'd been involved with the Pasadena Art Museum's demise, knew that spending money on a building at the expense of the operating endowment could prove fatal.

Koshalek was relatively patient. "We sat in the board meetings. We listened to them, we didn't try to answer every concern, and, to a certain degree, we moved on. It was one of those situations where we said to ourselves, 'This idea is too good to not happen.'"

"Boards never want to get the institution into financial risk," says Koshalek. "They sometimes look at people with new ideas as the same kind of people who were behind the *Titanic*, right? You're going to either make it across the ocean, or you're going to go down on an iceberg. But you have to believe in something. You have to keep your eye on what the goal is."

One ally whom Koshalek prevailed upon was Franklin Murphy, a medical doctor and the former chancellor of UCLA, who was then serving as CEO of the Times Mirror Company. Murphy was also on the board of LACMA, and a philanthropist in his own right. Koshalek invited Murphy to Central Avenue and unlocked that small door to the abandoned warehouse. "Franklin," said Koshalek with a wide gesture towards the cavernous space, "we want to turn this thing into a museum."

Franklin Murphy took a hard look at the piles of rusted metal, at the rats scurrying from corner to corner. He

observed the metal shelving with car parts and boxes of bullets, cartons of emergency supply soda crackers. Silent for several moments, he finally managed, "My god, it's a Rauschenberg combine!" What could he do to help? Koshalek urged Murphy to advocate for the project with civic and institutional leaders.

Koshalek also invited Mayor Tom Bradley to see the building, once again unlocking that little door, as if to reveal Ali Baba's treasures. Bradley also noted the rodents and the piles of junk. He hadn't liked the building back when it was a police vehicle depot, when he'd parked his squad car there. He was honestly perplexed. "Why would you want this building?" Koshalek assured him that they really did want the building, explained its potential as performance and exhibition space.

For one thing, the Olympics were coming, Koshalek reminded him, and secondly, several projects were already in development, notably a collaboration between Lucinda Childs, Frank Gehry, and composer John Adams commissioned by Julie Lazar. Convinced, Bradley gave his permission for MOCA to take it over. (Over the years, Bradley would call to ask, "Are there any artists working today?" He loved to drop by The Temporary Contemporary to watch and talk with artists at work; Michael Heizer was a favorite.)

Broad finally agreed to greenlight the project. There were conditions. The lease on the space could only be temporary. That requirement wasn't hard to fulfill; as it turned out a temporary-occupancy certificate was easier and less expensive to procure than a permanent one. Broad also stipulated that no MOCA monies already raised could be used for either the building renovation or the ongoing founders endowment campaign—that money was to be reserved for the museum's operating costs once it opened.

For help, Koshalek turned to the museum's core constituency, artists. With support from board members Sam Francis, Robert Irwin, Fred Nicholas, and the cooperation of Sidney Felsen and his Gemini G.E.L. artists' workshop, Koshalek conceived of a plan to fund the renovation with sales of a limited edition portfolio of prints. Called *Eight by Eight to Celebrate The Temporary*

*Contemporary*, the portfolio ultimately featured work by Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, David Hockney, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Andy Warhol, with the box and front endpiece designed by Joseph Kosuth. Created as an edition of two hundred fifty sets, each one sold for \$10,000. First sales of the print portfolio brought in \$1 million. That sum plus a \$500,000 loan from ARCO (forgiven at a later date)—arranged by ARCO's founder, Robert O. Anderson, and trustee Bill Kieschnick—kick-started the construction. Kieschnick himself knew little about contemporary art (the only painting he owned was by Anna Mary Robertson, aka "Grandma Moses"), but he believed strongly in the idea of The Temporary Contemporary and the boost in confidence he was sure it was going to give to Los Angeles and its artists. Mayor Bradley shared this belief.

In late 1982, the MOCA staff moved out of Grand Avenue and set up shop in a suite of rented offices on Boyd Street in the Little Tokyo district, a few blocks from the Central Avenue warehouses, and at the edge of Skid Row. The location, in one of the scruffiest sections of downtown, meant cheap rent and the likelihood the staff could operate in relative independence from the trustees, a boon to unfettered creative planning.

The soon-to-be renovated warehouse found its name, the brainchild of graphic designer Ivan Chermayeff, who'd been tasked with designing MOCA's new logo (and who famously put the blue "O" in the Mobil logo). Over a breakfast, upon learning how Geldin and Koshalek had secured a temporary building permit, Chermayeff proclaimed, "I've got the perfect title, we'll call it The Temporary Contemporary." Popularly it was known as "The TC."

From the very beginning, Koshalek's plans went beyond simply renovating an interim warehouse. He envisioned the Central Avenue complex as a "city within a city." One building would be requisitioned for experimental theater, which Gordon Davidson, the charismatic founder of the Mark Taper Forum, might co-produce. Another building could be renovated for artists' studios. Gehry would build a chain-link galleria, a kind of industrial pergola over the street that would connect all the buildings into a

cultural district of artists and creative people. Those were the buildings that Koshalek had sketched for me in colored pens on the lunch menu of that Pasadena restaurant. Only two warehouses (Buildings 4 and 5) were ultimately deemed structurally safe by the city—combined, their 60,000 square feet would become The Temporary Contemporary. The other structures, including a small triangular building that had once been a gas station, were eventually demolished, though not before they served as temporary exhibition sites.

Julia Brown commissioned Maria Nordman, an artist known for her light-filled art presentations, to create a piece for the Guerrilla Museum phase of MOCA. Supervised by assistant curator Kerry Brougher, Nordman's presentation was titled *Yang-na*, the name of the largest settlement of the Tongva, the indigenous people of the Los Angeles basin. Since the building was slated to be demolished, Nordman was only able to negotiate a one-day permit from the city. She sent out typewritten announcements—"In the center of Los Angeles a place is being opened all the daytime hours: On its east side: 315 N. Alameda (just south of Temple); on its west side: 166 N. Central (north of First Street); June 8, 5:41 AM-8:03 PM."

For those fourteen-plus daytime hours, you were able to enter the old building—whose wooden floors the artist had flooded—through a handmade doorway erected on the Alameda Street side. Viewers were invited to first sit on carefully placed wooden chairs, then slosh through the shallow water, disoriented by the reflections of light as to what was up and what was down, what was art, what was the world. Critic Melinda Wortz described the piece as having "an ominous beauty." Bright daylight beckoned at either end of the space, heightening the sensation of moving from the light into the dark and out into the light again.

The museum convened a press conference on the warehouse loading dock to announce Frank Gehry as the architect of the new space. Christopher Knight, then art critic for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, wrote: "The running gag of the day became [Mayor] Bradley's opening reference to the grimy building as a 'marvelous hunk of junk.' 'I like this dismal piece of junk,' countered MOCA director Richard Koshalek when it was his time at the



SINCE THE BUILDING WAS SLATED TO BE DEMOLISHED, NORDMAN WAS ONLY ABLE TO NEGOTIATE A ONE-DAY PERMIT FROM THE CITY. SHE SENT OUT TYPEWRITTEN ANNOUNCEMENTS—“IN THE CENTER OF LOS ANGELES A PLACE IS BEING OPENED ALL THE DAYTIME HOURS: ON ITS EAST SIDE: 315 N. ALAMEDA (JUST SOUTH OF TEMPLE); ON ITS WEST SIDE: 166 N. CENTRAL (NORTH OF FIRST STREET); JUNE 8, 5:41 AM–8:03 PM.”



James Turrell, in *Occluded Front*, 1985, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

podium. Gehry added that his primary goal was simply ‘not to screw it up.’” That meant doing very little alteration of the existing architecture. Gehry retained the existing ramps, stairs, and boxlike rooms, including a 3,700-square-foot bunker. He sandblasted the ceiling, removed unnecessary ducts and pipes, fireproofed, and reinforced to code.

“It was a pretty fast process,” Sherri Geldin recounts, “and I remember Richard and I walking over to visit on the day they began demolition. They were excavating those trenches, and we couldn’t believe it was happening. It was like, huh? Really? We’re *really* gonna get this building? We were both kind of giddy.”

The sense of momentum was such that we did things “you normally wouldn’t do,” says Koshalek. Like commencing construction before obtaining a building permit. And, because the site was only blocks from City Hall, it wasn’t long before someone in the building department spotted the construction and demanded its halt. “So then, we had to go back to Mayor Bradley, who was a MOCA trustee, and say, ‘Please help us get this thing through City Hall.’ We apologized for starting before we should and without the permit and all of that. Then Tom Bradley and Councilman Joel Wachs worked it out.”

The Temporary Contemporary was too good an idea not to happen.

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Hiring the museum’s director from the Pompidou in Paris provided just the instant credibility that its trustees had hoped for. In that regard, Pontus Hultén performed his job well. His arrival gave a note of glamour to the new endeavor, and the press covered his appointment with due fanfare. His stature also helped secure funding and support from the community. “That Pontus came from the Pompidou, a major institution, was an extraordinary thing for Los Angeles,” comments Julia Brown, “but in other respects, Pontus was AWOL almost the entire time, except getting upset about things.”

Hultén did not like to be told what to do by the trustees; it frustrated and humiliated him. He had a European idea of what kind of privileges accrue to the role of museum

director. To Sherri Geldin, then fresh out of graduate school, Hultén’s gruff and imperious demeanor, combined with his legendary reputation, made him an intimidating figure. He didn’t have time to talk with the “petits poisons” (the “little fish”). Nevertheless, she recalls, “there were moments of humor and warmth, and Richard and I both felt quite protective of him amidst a board governance model that was completely foreign to him.”

One day, the phone rang at the Boyd Street office. It was somebody at the Los Angeles Harbor saying, “There’s a crate here for Pontus Hultén, and the bill is to be paid by MOCA. It’s a boat.” In actuality, it was a yacht. A large yacht. And it was a total surprise. The bill for shipping from Paris was \$25,000. Hultén had also shipped his favorite car, a Citroën. And his extensive library. Confusion, concern. How were they going to pay for it? How were they going to explain it to the trustees? “It was a very fragile institution from the beginning,” Koshalek says, “and I can tell you, we didn’t have very much money.”

They were juggling expenses. Once during this period, when trustee Bill Kieschnick tried to call Koshalek, he received a recorded message saying that the phone had been disconnected. They hadn’t paid the bill. The CEO sent his limousine over to Boyd Street. The driver climbed the stairs to the office, and asked, “Who’s Richard? Bill Kieschnick needs to see you; would you please get in the car and come over to ARCO?” Koshalek faced Kieschnick in his office. “Richard, we sold some land in downtown L.A.,” said the trustee. “We’ve got a check here for \$7 million from ARCO. Now please go pay the damn phone bill so that MOCA can continue to do what it needs to do.”

When Hultén was finally confronted with the tab for his yacht, he erupted in anger, pounded on a table, and insisted that the messenger, in this case, Sherri Geldin, be fired. She was not. Then MOCA found itself being sued by Hertz for unpaid bills concerning several accidents with rental cars in Europe. Hultén denied he had been involved in any accidents and ordered the person who questioned him for the insurance report be fired. Koshalek again refused, demanding an end to these excesses. “It was very difficult to get Pontus to come to grips with all of this. It was a very, very, very difficult time,” Koshalek recalls.



After just a few months, as Hultén continued to bang on tables, it was clear the situation was becoming unsalvageable. The institution was under stress. Hultén was under stress. He was homesick for Paris. “Pontus was Paris,” Koshalek says. “Pontus was Europe. He wanted out.”

In the fall of 1982, less than two years after he’d arrived, Hultén asked Koshalek to meet him in New York; he had something to tell him. At their Stanhope Hotel lunch, Hultén showed Koshalek a letter from Pompidou president Robert Bordaz stating that François Mitterrand was calling Pontus Hultén back to France to curate a Henri Matisse exhibition at something called the Paris Universal Exposition of 1989 (which never materialized). The MOCA board welcomed the news; it was a face-saving all round. They wouldn’t have to endure the public embarrassment of firing their director.

In November 1982, the trustees held a press conference in the ARCO boardroom to announce three significant developments: Pontus Hultén was being appointed to the newly created post of founding director, effective March 1983. Richard Koshalek, previously deputy director, was named museum director, also effective March 1983. Bill Kieschnick explained that Hultén was returning to Paris because he couldn’t say no to President Mitterrand or the French Republic, and that MOCA would miss him, though he would be continuing his association full-time until March 1983, then part-time until March 1984. In actuality, Hultén made only two more appearances at MOCA—at the opening of The Temporary Contemporary and at the *Automobile and Culture* show, on view at The TC during the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival.

Trustee Fred Nicholas made the second announcement, confirming lease arrangements with the city for the opening of The Temporary Contemporary in fall 1983. (The original five-year lease was later renegotiated to ninety-nine years. A real bargain at a dollar a year.) The final announcement was made by Eli Broad. The completion of financing for the permanent museum on Grand Avenue, to be designed by Arata Isozaki, would be secured by the end of the next month, December 1982.

A reporter threw out the question: “Pontus, how do you feel about returning to Paris?” Hultén’s answer

summarized his immense relief. “Sometimes in life,” he said, “you get lucky.”

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To supervise Gehry’s redesign of The TC, Koshalek and Sherri Geldin hired John Bowsher from the Walker. Bowsher was twenty-seven but was already, according to Robert Irwin, “a consummate pro.” At MOCA, Bowsher became known as the go-to guy, the man who never said no. “If John had ever walked into my office and said it couldn’t be done,” says Koshalek, “things would have been different. But John never did.” If Michael Heizer wanted to put a gash in the floor, or if Robert Gober needed to subterrestrially contain water that gushed violently down a staircase behind a cast-concrete figure of a life-sized Madonna, pierced with a metal culvert, to then flow down beneath the floor through a bronze grate, John Bowsher would find a way. “He was a master at translating an artist’s vision,” Julia Brown adds, “in making the impossible happen.” (In 2010, Bowsher engineered the journey of a 680,000-pound granite boulder from a quarry a hundred miles away to LACMA, for Michael Heizer’s *Levitated Mass*.)

As Bowsher and his crew were tearing away plaster to expose the wooden rafters of the warehouse, they were also constructing Frank Gehry’s asymmetrical two-level stage set for *Available Light*, the Lucinda Childs/Frank Gehry/John Adams collaboration. By opening the raw space of The TC with this innovative performance, MOCA “planted a flag in the sand,” as Sherri Geldin put it, signaling its multimedia and interdisciplinary intentions from the start. The five evenings of sold-out performances in October of 1983 were a cultural highlight for Los Angeles. Eleven dancers, including Childs, moved to create constantly shifting geometric patterns, their billowy costumes (by Ronaldus Shamask) flowing around them. Beverly Emmons designed the striking red and orange lights that saturated the stage, and she—per Gehry’s suggestion—lit the facade of the building across the street, adding what Lazar called “a choreographic animation of its own.” Gehry’s split-level set gave Childs the opportunity to choreograph on a vertical as well as a horizontal axis. Photographers Grant Mudford and Garry Winogrand documented the piece, and their elegant black-and-white photos grace the catalogue—MOCA’s







*Available Light*, 1983, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



John Adams, Lucinda Childs, and Frank Gehry meeting about the *Available Light* commission held at Suzanne Lacy's studio in downtown L.A., 1983



first of many—which also included a vinyl LP of *Light over Water*, John Adams’s pulsing, eddying score.

Susan Sontag (Lucinda Childs’s lover at the time) was among the essayists included in the catalogue; she called the production “a work of euphoric buoyancy.” Local writers were less receptive. Music critic Martin Bernheimer wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*: “If this is light, let there be darkness.” The paper’s art critic William Wilson wrote, “The Temporary Contemporary has opened with the form considered the *ne plus ultra* of the avant-garde, the frontier of cutting edge: Performance Art.” He didn’t mean it kindly. When those reviews came out, Sherri Geldin recalls, “there were many distressed calls from the home of Mr. Broad.” *Available Light* moved to the Brooklyn Academy of Music two months later, for what was billed as its “world premiere” (as if L.A. did not exist), and Anna Kisselgoff in *The New York Times* described the collaboration as “a work of blazing formal beauty.” Over the years, the work would be called “dazzlingly complex,” “a breakthrough,” “magisterial,” and a “masterpiece,” and it continues to be performed all over the world.

That same summer of 1983, John Walsh, a scholar of seventeenth-century Dutch painting, arrived in Los Angeles from Boston, where he’d been paintings curator at the Museum of Fine Arts. Getty Trust President Harold M. Williams had persuaded Walsh to take over directorship of the J. Paul Getty Museum, soon to break ground for a \$733 million complex designed by architect Richard Meier in the Santa Monica Mountains on the city’s west side. Walsh remembers feeling stunned by the performance of *Available Light*. “I had some idea who Lucinda Childs was,” he says, “but not John Adams. When I heard the piece described, my conventional mind said, ‘Uh-oh.’ But the score was mesmerizing, the double-decker set seemed part of the building, the movements (and pantaloons!) were strict and somehow timeless/exotic. I remember feeling proud of MOCA for putting it on. I reassured myself that Los Angeles really was an adventuresome, gutsy place, etc., and that maybe I’d traded up.”

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A month later, with the building renovation nearing completion, The TC began gearing up for its inaugural exhibition, *The First Show*, set for a November opening.

The curators—Koshalek and Julia Brown—secured loans from eight noted private art collections: Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo, Dominique de Menil, Drs. Peter and Irene Ludwig, Charles and Doris Saatchi, Howard and Jean Lipman, the Weisman Family, Robert A. Rowan, and Rita and Taft Schreiber. One hundred forty priceless works of art, most never before seen in Los Angeles, to be exhibited in an industrial warehouse that lacked climate control or air conditioning. A conservator assured the two curators, who reassured the collectors: “It’s Southern California. There’s not that much difference in climate between the inside of Marcia Weisman’s house and The Temporary Contemporary.” None of the collectors balked. Besides, the momentum was palpable; who could say no?

Working on the installation crew for *The First Show* was a young man named John Seed, recently graduated from UC Berkeley with a master’s degree in painting. Excited about his job with the new museum and optimistic that downtown L.A. was the next SoHo, Seed rented a two-room loft at 432 South Main Street, near the Union Rescue Mission on Skid Row. For \$350 a month, he got high ceilings, a kitchen sink, a bathroom down the hall, a view of an alley. A porn movie theater occupied the ground floor; the corner store sold cheap wine. “I should have been more afraid of my neighborhood,” he remembers, “but naïveté saved me.” On his fifteen-minute walk to work he passed the mentally ill, drug addicts, impoverished immigrants, and hustlers, all trying to survive as best they could. An excerpt from his memoir, *My Art World: Recollections and Other Writings*, is a portal into that time through a young artist’s eyes:

*From the moment I arrived until The First Show opened in November, The TC was a beehive of activity. Crated art was arriving from all over the world, including giant canvasses from the Saatchi Collection in London that had been inserted into special leaning crates that barely fit into a Boeing 747 cargo jet.*

*My first glimpse of the museum’s director, Richard Koshalek, came when he ordered that a freestanding display wall intended for a hulking Julian Schnabel painting be instantly demolished and then re-erected a few yards away. Koshalek, I would learn, had pharaonic*

*self-confidence. He was a great guy, but he tended to wear out the people who worked for him. He liked to state that MOCA, with a staff of around forty people, was mounting exhibitions that were comparable to those of the Whitney in New York, which had a staff of over one hundred. If the museum’s top administrator, Sherri Geldin, hadn’t been there to provide reality checks, who knows what he would have asked us to do.*

*The Temporary Contemporary was a soaring, flexible space, and it wasn’t the last time that I saw walls fall and rise in a matter of days or even hours. My memory of that period is a blur, but I do remember the fatigue of working long hours interspersed with the excitement of uncrating and installing great works of art. Seeing the vivid lunar blue of Yves Klein’s sponge and pebble Requiem as it was uncrated was so moving that when The First Show was over, I took the exhibition label home as a relic and pinned it to my wall.*





### PART III: A COLLECTION OF COLLECTIONS

As a young artist in the 1950s, Robert Irwin passionately wanted to see an actual painting by his favorite Abstract Expressionist, an artist who would be a huge influence on his own work. But there was not one Willem de Kooning to be seen in all of Los Angeles, and there would not be until Walter Hopps showed the Dutch-born artist at the Ferus Gallery in 1960. Irwin was still rankled by that deprivation when Lawrence Weschler interviewed him in the early 1980s: “If I’d never seen a de Kooning except in a magazine, I’d have been operating from a bad record.”

From the earliest discussions about the nature of MOCA, in board meetings and in private discussions with Hultén and Koshalek, Irwin was adamant that Los Angeles artists be able to see firsthand the great art of the twentieth century, in order to deepen their own dialogues with both living artists and past masters.

The MOCA board came to agree with Irwin, but the more specific conditions—how they would do that, what the future collection of the museum might actually be, and where it might come from—weighed on the minds of directors, curators, and MOCA trustees alike in that summer of 1983.

One of the first orders of business was to ensure that important California collections remained in Los Angeles. The loss of the Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1950 was a cautionary tale lost on no one. To that end, Koshalek and Julia Brown set off to study private collections in and around Los Angeles (and in New York, Germany, and Japan). What would *this* particular collection mean to MOCA? When purchasing, should they go after a part of a collection, or an entire collection? As they sought a strategy they were well aware of the gaze of the competition—LACMA, the Whitney, the National Gallery, as well as major art dealers, like Larry Gagosian. Meanwhile, the international trustees, particularly Dominique de Menil and Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, were crucial to helping the MOCA board understand why it was important for the integrity of a museum—particularly a new museum—not to compromise standards in terms of acquiring the best of an artist’s work.

De Menil was a calming influence, ballast to the *Sturm und Drang* of MOCA board meetings. She spoke eloquently about what gave a museum quality and what impact a museum could play in the larger world. “Art,” she said, is “primary,” as essential as the air we breathe. As the heiress to Schlumberger—a multinational oil company—Dominique, together with her husband John de Menil, used their fortune to develop one of the world’s largest private art collections. Their method was intensely personal, based on the belief that there exists a profound spiritual connection between the art of ancient cultures and our own, that an art collection should be an archive of what it means to be human.

In June 1983, Koshalek received a tantalizing handwritten letter from the city of Varese, Italy, from Count Panza. The sixty-year-old businessman, it turned out, had a tax problem. Was there any way, he inquired, that MOCA could buy his art collection? Panza also sent a box containing reproductions of all the works in question; they constituted one of the finest collections of twentieth-century artworks in private hands.

Koshalek first made Panza’s acquaintance while director of the Fort Worth Art Museum. “I picked up the phone and an urbane voice that sounded like the actor Peter Sellers said, ‘Hello, I am Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, and I would be pleased if you could show me the Dan Flavin exhibition.’” Of course he would be happy to do so. When they toured the museum together, Panza asked questions and jotted things down in a little black notebook he kept in the vest pocket of his bespoke suit. “He asked, ‘What artists are you watching these days?’ and, ‘What period of Bruce Nauman’s work are you most interested in?’” Flattered to be interrogated in this manner, Koshalek later learned that Panza asked these questions of every museum director, curator, and artist whom he encountered. As he explained to *Vogue* in 2007: “Understanding new art was like discovering a new theory in physics, or a new celestial body. It was born of this same desire, to know the unknown.”

Panza built his collection by scholarship and study, collecting in depth usually from an artist’s most fertile early period. He was self-taught in art and art history. During an adolescent bout with scarlet fever, quarantined for over a

DE MENIL WAS A CALMING INFLUENCE, BALLAST TO THE *STURM UND DRANG* OF MOCA BOARD MEETINGS. SHE SPOKE ELOQUENTLY ABOUT WHAT GAVE A MUSEUM QUALITY AND WHAT IMPACT A MUSEUM COULD PLAY IN THE LARGER WORLD. “ART,” SHE SAID, IS “PRIMARY,” AS ESSENTIAL AS THE AIR WE BREATHE.







Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo, Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza, Varese, 1966

month in his room, Panza pored over works of art in Italian encyclopedias. In 1943, just twenty, he fled his native Italy to avoid conscription by the Fascists and took refuge in a Swiss village he learned was the birthplace of artist Paul Klee. After the war, he earned a law degree to please his father (who'd been given the title Count by King Vittorio Emanuele III), but he never practiced law. His eventual inheritance from his family's real estate and distillery business freed him to embark on what became his greatest passion—as a collector and steward of great art.

On Panza's first visit to the States in 1954, he fell in love with Abstract Expressionism. Two years later, after seeing a black-and-white photograph of a Franz Kline painting in an Italian magazine, he purchased the painting, *Buttress*, at the bargain price of \$500. He then moved on to Pop, Minimalism, environmental art, and Conceptualism. There was little American art on view in Europe at the time, and few European collectors interested in acquiring it. Panza collected some twenty-five hundred works in total, often seizing upon little-known artists who would later attain blue-chip status and command astronomical prices. "I have always purchased art that was rejected, derided, and even ignored, but that thirty years later entered museums. Good ideas are assimilated slowly," he wrote.

The work Panza acquired found its way to the spacious interiors, the outbuildings, and even the stables of the Villa Menafoglio Litta, in Varese, where he rearranged entire floors to accommodate space-demanding Minimalist art; Dan Flavin, and Donald Judd were two of his great enthusiasms. He adored the work of Claes Oldenburg and displayed the artist's large painted plaster sculpture, *Hamburger with Pickle and Olive*, on the walls of a classical sitting room, the two condiments looming above elegant velvet armchairs. Sited works were of natural interest to an Italian, he told one interviewer: "I've been studying art painted on walls and created for niches my whole life." In the villa, Robert Irwin installed *Varese Portal Room*, a tall acrylic column that refracted sunlight and scattered rainbows across the white stucco walls while the column itself seemed to melt away. Pontus Hultén, who visited the Panzas at Varese a number of times, wrote: "The villa ceased to be a work of only one historical period and seemed to live anew, refreshed by its proximity to young and vital works of art."

It was Robert Irwin who urged Panza to make his first trip to Los Angeles in 1972, to "discover a new world that could only be understood by experiencing it" and where he would encounter other artists who were working with varying perceptions of light. From that first visit Panza and his wife Giovanna were enamored of the city; they felt as if under a spell. Panza described the sensation in his *Memoirs of a Collector*: "To get to Los Angeles on the other side of the continent, you have to cross the deserts of the Far West where light, in all of its beauty and splendor, is the dominant element.... Light is life, it is vision, it is knowledge; it is a beautiful gift given to us by Nature." Panza grasped the connection between the city's extraordinary sunlight and the West Coast artist's sense of freedom and willingness to take risks with materials and ideas. He began making twice-yearly trips to Los Angeles for weeks at a time, visiting studios and establishing long-term relationships with artists.

Artist Mark Lere recalls a somewhat unnerving visit by Count Panza to his Los Angeles studio in the early 1980s. As Lere showed him sculptures and drawings and prints, Panza perched on a stool, listening and jotting in his black notebook but saying barely a word for three hours. That night over dinner at Musso & Frank's, Panza peppered the young artist—whose work he had begun to collect—with questions. "He had noticed every detail in the studio," Lere says, "and now he wanted to know how a certain piece could be hung, how it should be lit, how it might be displayed at the villa."

Koshalek immediately brought Panza's purchase offer to a core group of artists, staff, and trustees, including Morton Winston, chairman of MOCA's acquisitions committee, Lenore Greenberg, and board chair Eli Broad, who offered plane fare to bring Panza to California to begin negotiations right away.

Wait. Pay for it with ... what? MOCA did not have \$11 million in its budget to spend. There was a lot of stress on the institution, a pressure to succeed but also to avoid bankruptcy.

Moreover, the acquisitions committee was aware that for a museum to purchase a trustee's collection was a highly unorthodox practice, one that could encourage corrupt



motives among board members, who were expected to donate art. Other museum directors around the country would and did object, fearing the purchase would set a bad precedent. Nonetheless, it seemed to those involved too good an opportunity to dismiss. Koshalek shrugged off the objections. “We proceeded very aggressively after the collection,” he said, “almost like a military operation.”

Due to Panza’s tax difficulties, the collection was temporarily stored at the Zurich airport in a duty-free zone. Koshalek and trustee Morton Winston flew to Switzerland, where they were joined by Panza. It might have looked like a scene from *Casablanca*—a rendezvous near the tarmac; the din of aircraft outside a cavernous warehouse; the Italian count in the three-piece suit; the handlers in blue overalls unpacking priceless artworks from wooden containers. The first piece to emerge from its crate was Claes Oldenburg’s *Hamburger with Pickle and Olive*, at which point Count Panza began to cry. “He really loved these works,” Koshalek says, “and they were leaving his home.”

Panza agreed to a deal, negotiated by trustees Eli Broad and Fred Nicholas and especially Morton Winston, whose skills were crucial to its success. Payments would be spread over a period of five years, with a series of “escape hatches,” in case the museum couldn’t meet the schedule. There was to be no interest. Remarkably Panza and the full board agreed to it. Koshalek was jubilant. The final agreement, summarized in a one-page handwritten contract, is now archived in Panza’s papers at the Getty Research Institute. “What it said to me,” Koshalek recalls, “was that this board had the confidence to take major risks for the sake of the museum’s future.”

Mayor Bradley—flanked by Count and Giovanna Panza—announced the acquisition of the Panza Collection from his office at City Hall at a press conference on February 28, 1984. “There isn’t an institution that I can think of,” Bradley proclaimed in his sonorous bass, “that has, in the last fifty years, if not longer, made an acquisition of this scale and scope. It establishes a collection core for MOCA that is without parallel. MOCA will now be the mecca for those who want to see in-depth the great work of the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s, just as the Museum of Modern Art New York has been the place to go for works from the teens.”

The first payment for the collection loomed just twelve months away. Before the press conference Koshalek and Winston paced backstage, practicing what they might say should a journalist ask, “How are you going to pay for this?” “Where’s the money coming from?” No one did. “Afterwards we got a call from J. Carter Brown [longtime director of the National Gallery of Art], and he said, ‘Richard, extraordinary, extraordinary! Where did such a young institution get the money to pay for this collection?’ And I said, ‘We actually don’t have the money.’”

So, before it even had a museum in which to display it, or the money to pay for it, MOCA had acquired a priceless core collection—today valued at over a billion dollars—and instant credibility. More good fortune came in the person of a philanthropist who stepped up to contribute a substantial percentage of the purchase price, allowing the museum to pay it off in just three years. Though she remains “elegantly anonymous” to this day, what motivated her, says Koshalek, was “the foresight and strong belief that her gift was going to bring other collections of that quality to the museum.”

Koshalek’s ultimate goal was to build a “collection of collections” with depth in every postwar decade. Not long after the Panza deal was done, Koshalek heard about a superb Southern California collection with work from the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. It belonged to TV executive Barry Lowen. Starting in the mailroom at the William Morris Agency, Lowen rose to become Aaron Spelling’s vice president for creative affairs. But he was equally or better known for the paintings and sculpture that dominated his hillside home above the city. Lowen was noted for his magnificent eye and for the seriousness of his collecting. He made a habit of trading an artist’s lesser work for one of more value. Over the years he filled his home with Frank Stella’s oils painted on aluminum, the stone units of Carl Andre, and calligraphy and panels from a chosen assortment of artists. He covered over windows and glass doors in order to have more display space for his art. He curated individual rooms so that all the works within supported one another in surprising ways. His garden was crowded with sculptures of bronze and stone.

Koshalek and Julia Brown paid Lowen a visit in 1984. They were both impressed with the collector’s desire

to understand the pieces he was collecting and to place them in the larger context of the period in which they were created. On that first visit they asked Lowen if he would consider donating a magnificent painting displayed on the wall of his living room, Susan Rothenberg’s *The Hulk*. The canvas was the first of a celebrated series of forty large glyph-like horse paintings that Rothenberg made after years of creating mostly geometric pattern paintings in the Minimalist mode. This made the painting a significant piece for MOCA to acquire.

Lowen demurred, though he still welcomed Koshalek back six months later, when he tried again. Would Lowen consider donating his Donald Judd sculpture to MOCA? This time, Lowen grew agitated. He was a young man, he scolded. He had plenty of time to continue to build and strengthen his collection, plenty of time to think about where he might eventually donate it.

Only he didn’t have time. Not long after, Lowen phoned Koshalek saying he wanted to speak privately. They met at a restaurant in the Valley. “Lowen looked at me, and his exact words were, ‘I’m going to be hit by a truck.’ I truly did not know what that meant. He said, ‘Richard, I have AIDS and I’m dying.’ He said, ‘You were the one that came to see me often, the one who showed the greatest interest. I want my complete collection to go to the same museum that has the Panza Collection.’”

Lowen was only fifty when he was diagnosed with AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, a disease that was ravaging the gay community. There was no effective treatment—and not even a test for the HIV virus, which causes AIDS, until 1985—and a diagnosis then usually meant death. Lowen asked Koshalek not to reveal to anyone that he’d promised his collection to MOCA until after his death, a pact Koshalek kept despite constant trustee inquiries. Over the next months, the two conferred frequently, sitting together at Lowen’s dining room table, talking about the strengths and weaknesses of the collection. They sketched out plans for *The Lowen Collection* exhibition—sixty-eight paintings, sculptures, photographs, and drawings from forty-one artists—at The Temporary Contemporary.

Per Lowen’s instructions, within an hour of his passing, his lawyer phoned Koshalek, who relayed the news to

Mo Shannon, MOCA’s registrar, who dispatched a MOCA crew and a crane, and within twenty-four hours, per agreement, they had removed all the artwork. It now belonged to MOCA—a stunning addition to the core collection.

As he had done with the Panza Collection, Koshalek had decided—in a break with curatorial practice—to invite Lowen to design the first installation of his collection at The TC. This became a tradition unique to MOCA, based on the idea that there was much to learn from a collector’s individual aesthetic. “Panza’s installations at his villa in Varese and Lowen’s installation at his home were instructive and inspirational,” Koshalek says. Lowen, he adds, “was getting more intellectually involved in his collection every day. He was thinking about it all the time. He was working on putting this puzzle together. But unfortunately, he only got the puzzle partially finished.”

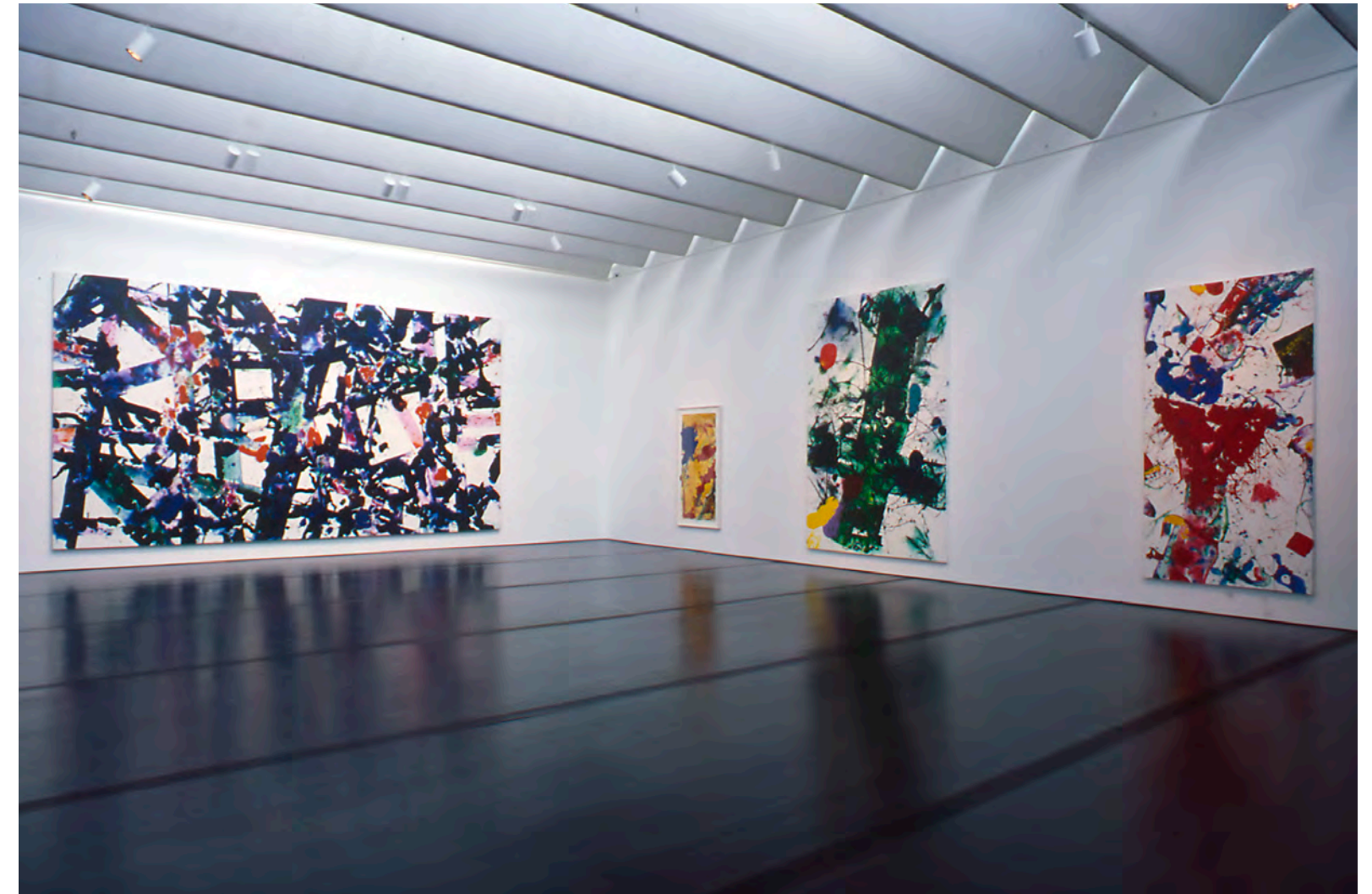
In just a decade, from 1984 to 1994, Koshalek, together with MOCA’s curators, succeeded in securing MOCA’s “collection of collections.” In 1989 trustee Lenore Greenberg and her mother, Rita Schreiber, secured the family’s agreement to donate the Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection, which had been assembled, Koshalek notes, “with extraordinary sensitivity, passion, and clear-sighted discipline.” Among its treasures: Pollock’s masterpiece, *Number 1, 1949*, painted when the artist was at the height of his powers, a work that opened up new possibilities for artists in terms of expressive content; Mondrian’s *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* (1939); Arshile Gorky’s *Betrothal I* (1947), from the most mature and revolutionary period in Gorky’s career; and Alberto Giacometti’s huge, haunting cast-bronze *Large Standing Woman II* and *III* (1960). That same year, 1989, Philip and Beatrice Gersh donated their collection—twelve paintings, sculptures, photos, and drawings from 1912 to 1988, which included one of David Smith’s last works, the towering aluminum *Cubi III* (1961), Susan Rothenberg’s *Black Dress* (1982–83), and Alexis Smith’s *Story From My Childhood* (1977). Curator Kerry Brougher wrote that the Gersh collection could be considered “a microcosm of the history of twentieth-century art,” and noted that the guiding force that shaped the spirit of that collection and forged connections among unlikely companions was “not the will of history, but rather the will of the collectors.”



IN JUST A DECADE, FROM 1984 TO 1994, KOSHALEK, TOGETHER WITH MOCA'S CURATORS, SUCCEEDED IN SECURING MOCA'S "COLLECTION OF COLLECTIONS." IN 1989 TRUSTEE LENORE GREENBERG AND HER MOTHER RITA SCHREIBER SECURED THE FAMILY'S AGREEMENT TO DONATE THE RITA AND TAFT SCHREIBER COLLECTION, WHICH HAD BEEN ASSEMBLED, KOSHALEK NOTES, "WITH EXTRAORDINARY SENSITIVITY, PASSION, AND CLEAR-SIGHTED DISCIPLINE."



Taft Schreiber at home with Alberto Giacometti's *Large Standing Woman II*, 1960, and *Large Standing Woman III*, 1960



Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969, in Nevada, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Installation view of Sam Francis: *Paintings 1947-1990*, at The Menil Collection, 1999



ON NOVEMBER 17, A SHINTO PURIFICATION CEREMONY—OFFERINGS OF FOOD, A PRIEST IN A PEAKED CAP RECITING ANCIENT PRAYERS, RITUAL DANCE—MARKED THE FORMAL INAUGURATION OF THE TEMPORARY CONTEMPORARY. IT WAS INTENDED AS A SIGN OF RESPECT BETWEEN THE MUSEUM AND ITS JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEIGHBORS.



Shinto purification ceremony, The Temporary Contemporary, 1983, Little Tokyo, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

One could look, say, at a Wassily Kandinsky watercolor from 1912 next to an untitled Gerhard Richter abstract painting from 1986, and mistake them as works from the same moment in time.

Several museums had lobbied Marcia Weisman, hoping she would donate Jasper Johns's 1962 masterpiece, *Map*, a painting that provided a crucial link between Abstract Expressionism and Pop. Weisman decided to donate it as part of her bequest to MOCA because, as she told Suzanne Muchnic in the *Los Angeles Times*, "everything goes to the East. The map is coast-to-coast and art should be that way too."

Artists made gifts of their own work, as trustee Sam Francis did in 1993—ten huge paintings that added extraordinary depth to MOCA's permanent collection, which also included donated artwork from Paul McCarthy, Doug Aitken, Andreas Gursky, and Ed Moses. In 1995, gallerist Virginia Dwan donated Michael Heizer's early earthwork *Double Negative*, on Mormon Mesa near Overton, Nevada, where the artist excavated two facing slots, each 30 feet wide and 50 feet deep, on opposite sides of a curved mesa. With this piece, MOCA became the first museum to add environmental art to its permanent collection. The museum was now in possession—in absentee stewardship—of what William Wilson in the *Los Angeles Times* called "a hole in the ground as big as the Empire State Building." Heizer's own proviso was that the work not be maintained but allowed to decay, an emblem of natural entropy. *Double Negative* is, to this day, accessible 24/7, 365 days a year, no tickets required—you just have to get there.

Six months into the Covid-19 pandemic, as I'm writing this essay, MOCA, like most museums, is closed. Most libraries are closed. We've been living life in lockdown. With archives inaccessible, I was fortunate to get my hands on key MOCA catalogues, a few at a time, thanks to a resourceful librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library. This morning, I slowly paged through the catalogue for the Barry Lowen Collection, a testament to the puzzle he was never able to finish. As I looked at the works, a line from Stanley Kunitz's poem "The Layers" came to mind: *How shall the heart be reconciled to its feast of losses?*

It's fitting, even eerie, how many of these works collected by a man who died in a devastating plague year speak so resonantly to me at this moment. Richard Artschwager's reflective pastel Formica cubes remind me of those rigid squares on a Zoom call at that moment someone's kindness or insight shines through. Cindy Sherman's brooding photograph of a woman sleep deprived, beset by dark dreams of isolation, also seems to apply to a life in quarantine. I gasp when I take my first real look at Susan Rothenberg's *The Hulk*, seeing the white foreleg bones and skeletal head of some primordial horse struggle its way out of the thickly painted dark backdrop of a human torso. The horse figure—a theme the artist continued for many years—initially emerged onto Rothenberg's canvas after the birth of her first child. It seems as if the painting screams, Let me live!

Gehry's redesign and renovation of the warehouse was completed in November of 1983. Lumber from the double-decker *Available Light* stage was repurposed for the exhibition walls of the inaugural exhibition *The First Show*. A chain-link backdrop from the production was also put to use in an outdoor galleria, The TC's open-air "front porch."

On November 17, a Shinto purification ceremony—offerings of food, a priest in a peaked cap reciting ancient prayers, ritual dance—marked the formal inauguration of The Temporary Contemporary. It was intended as a sign of respect between the museum and its Japanese American community neighbors. This mélange of cultures is what some of us love most about this city (I speak as an Angeleno who for years attended Yom Kippur services in a Zen Buddhist garden in the heart of L.A.'s Oaxacan community, breaking the yearly fast with a shot of Stoli and kimchee tacos).

The art press had been waiting with great anticipation for the opening. Earlier that summer, Koshalek and Fred Nicholas traveled to New York for a press preview in a large meeting room they'd rented at The Museum of Modern Art, unveiling—with characteristic enthusiasm and panache—both the model for the Isozaki building on Grand Avenue, as well as the model for Gehry's renovation of the two warehouses. Brendan Gill, longtime writer



for *The New Yorker* and a prominent advocate for architectural preservation, introduced the two men. John Russell of *The New York Times* described the two art evangelists from the West Coast as “buoyant as new balls on the center court at Wimbledon.”

At the building’s opening, architecture critic Joseph Giovannini in *The New York Times* hailed the museum’s “instant impact” on the cultural climate and confidence of Los Angeles. It had been almost a decade since the demise of the Pasadena Art Museum. Los Angeles now had its own home for contemporary art, a space of enormous scale and unique flexibility. You couldn’t knock walls down at the Whitney or the Guggenheim. At The TC, the entire interior could be torn apart and reconfigured to fit the needs of a particular artist’s vision. If needed, outer walls as well. The energy generated by spatial possibilities, coupled by the institution’s staunch support, infuses several of the artists’ statements and interview excerpts included in this book.

MOCA curators and staff working at that formative time remember the crackling excitement, optimism, and sheer exhaustion of bringing a museum into being. It felt like everything was happening at once because everything was happening at once. As soon as one project was initiated, it was on to planning the next. Kerry Brougher recalls the “whirlwind energy and momentum that took hold of us like a drug and drove everyone forward at an astonishing pace.”

It helped that the staff was young and energetic, able and willing to work long hours. Julia Brown swam laps every day to work off tension. Julie Lazar went rock climbing out in Joshua Tree. “While you’re on a rock and your life depends on your attention to it, you don’t think about anything else,” she says with a laugh. When he could, Kerry Brougher practiced Chopin études on the piano; Koshalek and Robert Irwin blew off steam by jogging together up and down the steep stairs at the UCLA track or going to the other track, at Hollywood Park, which the men considered serious business. Koshalek recalls, “There was no casual conversation. Bob was studying the horses, handicapping, etc.”

A premise of MOCA’s founding ethos, of great importance to Koshalek, was to nurture talent, to empower staff to develop ideas, to follow their passions, to encourage a diversity of viewpoints. Erica Clark was development director when she proposed curating the literary series that became *Racing Towards the Millennium*. With no formal curatorial training, Julie Lazar practically invented the role of inter-media curator at MOCA (or, as she was known among colleagues, “Curator of All that Moves”), drawing on her long immersion in the New York avant-garde visual and performing arts scene. “Richard encouraged us to be who we were,” Lazar says. “He’d give people a chance if you had talent or ideas.”

Alma Ruiz is another example. In 1983 Ruiz had just returned home to Los Angeles from Italy, where she’d been studying art on a graduate program. To make ends meet, she’d taken a job as a secretary at Bill Norris’s law firm, where she received an invitation to the opening of *The First Show* at The TC. “I’d never seen anything like that in my entire life,” she says. “At the time, I was not very aware of the extent of contemporary art, what artists were working on, what sort of movements there were. Though I had seen contemporary art in Italy, my main interest was Baroque art, so I was looking in a different direction.”

Several months later Ruiz, fluent in several languages and familiar with international museums, joined the MOCA staff as Koshalek’s executive assistant. “There was so much excitement about a new museum in Los Angeles,” she says, “and the amount of people that called on a regular basis to say they wanted to come meet with Richard was staggering. It was hard for us to do almost any work during the day because there were so many visitors and so many distractions. On most days the museum wouldn’t quiet down until about late afternoon.”

When Count and Giovanna Panza came to Los Angeles in 1984 to discuss the sale of their collection, Ruiz became their unofficial museum liaison. “We would converse in Italian,” she says, “and they felt comfortable asking me to help them set up their L.A. visits. I was privy to many of Panza’s conversations about art. He had so many stories to tell and was always glad when someone would listen. I visited the Panzas in Milan, and they opened their home

to me.” Ruiz would go on to have a distinguished career as a curator at MOCA, pioneering the Latin American art program and curating many groundbreaking shows.

In 1992, when it was still rare for an American museum to showcase architecture, MOCA produced the first-ever retrospective of the great Louis Kahn, *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, designed by Arata Isozaki. The show toured the country and then went on to Japan’s Gunma Prefecture and to the large, airy space on the top floor of the Pompidou Center in Paris, where it seemed to cement the young MOCA’s “international reach.” Other traveling exhibitions further extended the institution’s impact and, over the years, became a steady income stream for MOCA.

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If you came downtown in that inaugural season to see the massive scumbled paintings by Cy Twombly or the whirling vortices of Pollock’s *Number 1, 1949*, or the stunning lunar blue Yves Klein painting, *Requiem*, you might have wandered into a separate exhibition without realizing it. This ostensibly invisible exhibit was as significant to the future of MOCA as any of those iconic canvases on display in the open warehouse.

On a column at the entrance to the museum hung a printed sign that read: “The Michael Asher Lobby.” Asher was an L.A. native who became an instructor and mentor

to young artists at the California Institute of the Arts, as well as the patron saint of what is known as “institutional critique.” On the information counter in his lobby Asher left a pile of folded business cards stating the artist’s intent: “I have proposed to The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles that an agreement be made which will give me a license for the aesthetic control of the lobby area of the Museum. In so doing, the Museum will then sublicense this area making it possible to be rented from me on a monthly basis.” That meant that the museum “rented” its own space from the artist, according to a contract drafted by Michael Asher, for twenty months. The business cards, the sign, even the claimed lobby were the artist’s performative materials, setting what one critic called “the texts of the artist’s discussions strategized within the politics of space.” Calvin Tomkins had observed that camels had been invited into the tent. Now they’d even taken over the lobby.

Asher created few objects, his work was to raise questions. What is the public function of a museum? How might we consider and reconsider all the factors—political, economic, architectural, psychological—that influence what art we consider “valuable”? Rather than merely housing art that can be sold like any commodity, should a museum engage critically with the very definition of what art is? Could art be the conversation generated by the art? Could the museum be both an institution and an anti-institution? Indeed, what *is* a museum?





#### PART IV: THE QUESTIONS WE ASK

When the Olympic Games kicked off in the summer of 1984, the city of Los Angeles rolled out an extravaganza of an International Olympic Arts Festival. It was billed as the largest arts festival in U.S. history, masterminded by Robert Fitzpatrick, former dean of the California Institute of the Arts. With an avid audience of Angelenos and international visitors to the Olympics, the town experienced a global celebration of the performing arts that was like nothing that came before or after. Of the many European companies participating, Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal performed her *Rite of Spring* on the leaf-strewn stage of the Pasadena Civic Auditorium before a capacity crowd of three thousand. There were American debuts of works from Britain's Royal Opera, the National Theater of Greece, and Japan's experimental dance company Sankai Juku, whose nude dancers—hairless and covered in white powder—descended upside down by rope from the roof of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. At the Los Angeles Coliseum, Mayor Bradley dedicated Robert Graham's pair of 25-foot cast bronze athletic torsos as the official Olympic gateway. Placido Domingo sang "Olympic Fanfare" at the Hollywood Bowl.

Born just months before this explosion of creativity, The Temporary Contemporary jumped into the celebration. Thousands of visitors attended MOCA's crowd-pleaser of an exhibition, *Automobile and Culture*. Originally conceived by Pontus Hultén with Walter Hopps and museum consultant Marcy Goodwin, the show was ultimately overseen by Elizabeth A. T. Smith, hired out of graduate school ("in a pinch," she recalls, after Goodwin bowed out). It marked the beginning of Smith's seventeen-year career as a curator at MOCA. "Working on the show was exciting," Smith says, "and also chaotic, as Walter was very unpredictable and he didn't see eye to eye with everybody, including Pontus."

The TC was filled with thirty extraordinary cars, from the high-spirited, open-air Mercer Raceabout (1913), to a polished black Model S Lamborghini (1981). Among the two hundred works of art that featured automobiles was a facsimile drawing by Leonardo da Vinci of a "scythed vehicle," and paintings by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Sonia Delaunay, Salvador Dalí, Edward Hopper,

Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol. *Automobile and Culture* was an early signal that MOCA was dedicated to doing highly ambitious, unconventional, and thematic exhibitions.

For the festival MOCA also commissioned several artist-driven pieces. Three of them, in the spirit of the Guerrilla Museum initiative, happened beyond the museum's walls, the artists using the city itself as a canvas.

Mark Lere designed *Halo/Wheel*, a multi-part sculptural project for six park sites, five street locations, and one area of the Los Angeles River. Viewers received maps and were invited to venture forth by car to find the individual artworks and to contemplate the city from twelve different vantage points.

A meticulous craftsman and carpenter, Lere was fascinated by the symbolism of surveying and cartography. What are the systems that help us locate where we are? How do we come to know a city? In the days before GPS, most Angelenos kept a well-thumbed copy of the trusty Thomas Brothers guide in the glove compartment, to be consulted before heading for a freeway on-ramp. As historian Norman Klein writes, in L.A., "one literally passes through to arrive, but rarely stops."

*Halo/Wheel* required you to take surface streets to venture into neighborhoods you might never have visited—whether you were touring from Tokyo or Paris, or had lived in Los Angeles all your life. What you discovered en route were not monumental aspects of the city but discrete moments: laundromats, bungalow courts, tiendas, Korean Baptist churches, elementary-school playgrounds, car washes, nail salons with signs in Vietnamese, Armenian grocery stores, cemeteries where Chinese railroad workers had been laid to rest a century ago.

Each piece was constructed of materials appropriate to its site. For street works, Lere painted directly on the asphalt, drawing attention to manhole covers and storm drains. What lies underneath the city? On Stadium Way, behind Dodger Stadium, he notched a bench into a hillside so the viewer could contemplate an overview of the great basin, looking east toward the San Gabriel Mountains. At Hollenbeck Park, in Boyle Heights, you'd





find Lere's large wooden ellipse floating in a man-made lake, and if you glanced up, you'd see its reflection like a dark negative halo on the bottom of the massive Golden State Freeway overpass.

One morning when Lere and his team started installation at Trinity Park, in densely populated South Central L.A., they were confronted by a group of young men, whose leader demanded to know: "What are you doing here?" The site, it turned out, cut across gang territory. Lere explained that they were building a sculpture, as part of the Olympic Arts Festival. The young man softened and assured them not to worry, the work would remain undisturbed. He was true to his word.

Another MOCA Olympics commission, the Electronic Café was an exercise in early techno-activism. Selecting five popular restaurants in different neighborhoods (South Central, East L.A, Koreatown, Venice, and downtown at The TC), artists Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz opened all-day cafés equipped with video-conferencing equipment, high-resolution printers, search databases, slow-scan television cameras, and large overhead screens that looked as if they were borrowed from a B-movie sci-fi set. Personal computers were just coming in, inspiring in some the hope that telecommunications would prove emancipatory, an instrument of citizen empowerment. As artist and composer John Cage proclaimed in his 1967 book *A Year from Monday*: "Electronic democracy (instantaneous voting on the part of anyone): no government; no sheep." If only it were that simple.

At each café an artist-in-residence assisted folks who wanted to use the equipment. If you hung out at South Central's Gumbo House, for instance, visual artist Ulysses Jenkins—a "video griot"—would help produce your content, be it song, a gesture, a poem, a manifesto. You could then live-broadcast your creation to people at the consoles in Ana Maria's Café in East Los Angeles, who were listening and posting amidst strumming mariachis and the aroma of enchiladas and *pollo verde*. The Electronic Café called for communication across our psycho-geographic divide.

Rachel Rosenthal, a Paris-born performance-art icon who had fled Hitler's Europe, created *KabbaLAMobile*, a piece

rooted in her concerns about how we—as a culture—have replaced spiritual values with materialistic concerns while still yearning "for the transcendental and the mystical in our lives." For her site, she chose the parking lot fronting the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's seven-teen-story building, a symbol of institutional might that architectural historian Reyner Banham described as "sitting in firm control of the whole basis of human existence in Los Angeles." Rosenthal's spoken text was culled from two disparate sources—automotive-magazine copy and the Kabbala, the twelfth-century mystical Jewish system of interpretation in which every letter and every number of the Scriptures contains a key to understanding all that can be understood. Chanted over an electronic score by the performance artist known as The Dark Bob, the two texts worked together "so seamlessly," Rosenthal recalled, "that it was sometimes impossible to tell which was which." Both sources used language that "was ecstatic and completely esoteric. No one could understand either one unless one is an initiate."

You didn't have to be an initiate, however, to be spell-bound by Rosenthal's spectacle. I certainly was, even watching the fuzzy YouTube images decades later. Even at a distance, Rosenthal is imposing, a tall woman with shaved head and face daubed Kabuki white. She strides out of the underground garage, walks a serpentine path the entire length of the parking lot to a platform, 14 feet high, that resembles a lifeguard tower, and clambers up. Planting her feet in a wide straddle, she stands facing the audience seated before her on risers. She looks, wrote Jacki Apple in *Artweek*, "like a sorcerer who had suddenly and mysteriously materialized from the Tarot." Arms wide, eyes ablaze, Rosenthal begins her incantations:

*Remember the name YDVD, our God interpreted in my name ... Porsche 962 Jaguar XJUR5 Lola T616 ... Datsun 280Z ... Seven divided three against three, with one balancing the others ... one had merit, one is defective, and one balances the other two.*

As the electronic score begins to throb, the building's fountains startle to life in giant gasps of water spouting from the reflecting pool. Then another wonder rolls out from the garage: a bumper-to-bumper caravan of







Staff in front of MOCA's office at 428 Boyd Street, 1983, Little Tokyo, Los Angeles  
 L-R: Richard Koshalek, Polly Ahadzadeh, Julie Lazar, Pamela Wilson, Loretta Rey, Cardie Kremer, Sherri Geldin, Robert Sain, Sue Johnson, Julie Mayerson, Kerry Brougher, [unknown], Elizabeth Smith, Natasha Ebeling-Koning, June Kino-Cullen, Patricia Cleere, Cathy Allen, Lorraine Gordon, Betsy Greenberg, Ann Goldstein, Deborah Seid, Silvee Whitter, Julia Brown, Sylvia Hohri, Annamaria Lewis.

seven cars piloted by stunt-drivers. Joined together as if by magnets, they loop in synchronous and spiraling Kabbalistic formations, their figure eights becoming braids. At the conclusion a red Dodge Daytona tips onto its side, balances on two wheels, and dances circles around Rosenthal as the artist invokes deities and supernatural forces. “Art is what makes life more interesting than art,” the French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou once noted. After Rosenthal’s only-in-L.A. spectacle, could anyone ever see the L.A. Department of Water and Power (or for that matter, one’s car) in the same way as before?

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There was a seven-year gap from MOCA’s incorporation in 1979 to the December 1986 gala opening of Isozaki’s building at California Plaza on Bunker Hill. Though the delay caused all sorts of anxiety, Koshalek and others now consider it a blessing in disguise. Even before officially opening, MOCA was “firmly established in the front rank of museums of modern art in the country,” as Paul Goldberger wrote in *The New York Times*. It had acquired an exemplary permanent collection with a strong foundation in California art; and, as the idea of the Guerrilla Museum morphed into the Transitional Museum morphed into The Temporary Contemporary, the institution managed to maintain an extraordinary level of flexibility and openness to artists’ needs, to their spirit of experimentation.

In the spring of 1986, the staff closed up the Boyd Street offices and moved up to their new quarters on Grand Avenue. At the same time The Temporary Contemporary was granted new permanence. In April, the museum announced the signing of a fifty-year lease with the city, giving MOCA control of The TC until 2036. (In 2000, the city extended the lease to ninety-nine years.)

All of Los Angeles was eager to finally see their new “official” contemporary art museum—an elegant red Indian sandstone building topped with pyramids, with a copper-sheathed semicircular vault offering a symbolic gateway into the museum’s courtyard. It was the first significant design commission in the United States for the fifty-five-year-old Arata Isozaki, a leader in Japan’s rising generation of avant-garde architects. An architect friend recalls an early preview for the city’s art and design

community before any artworks were installed, where “the black-clad crowd discussed base molding details, lighting, and placement of thermostats and air conditioning grilles with the same fervor as art critics poring over a painting. It was easy not to notice that there was absolutely no art on the walls.” For one of the opening galas, the evening began with astonished wealthy donors riding the loading dock elevator to the art storage room in the basement, where the dinner was held.

Now MOCA was two architecturally renowned buildings. Artists could choose to show their work in the inviting informality of The TC, or the pristine defined spaces comprising Isozaki’s “subtle, supple design,” as Benjamin Forgey described it in *The Washington Post*. Many painters saw the Isozaki building as the “real museum,” Koshalek notes, its galleries varying in proportion and quality of light, both natural and artificial. “I’ve not seen white spaces like this before,” Cy Twombly exclaimed on his first viewing. Other artists—Robert Rauschenberg, Louise Nevelson, Richard Serra—preferred the rougher, more flexible expanse of The TC because it connected to their idea of a workspace. “I feel like I’m working outside because of the scale of this room,” Serra commented to Koshalek while installing his sculpture exhibition at The TC.

For the grand opening, in December 1986, Julia Brown curated *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, an exhibit of more than four hundred works by seventy-seven artists. The ambitious show spanned both buildings and included a comprehensive catalogue that was particularly expensive to produce. Koshalek set the fundraising goal at the beginning of the fiscal year in July 1985, but as the month of the opening came into view, a critical funding gap remained. Mayor Tom Bradley once again came to the museum’s rescue, using his personal Rolodex to contact the CEO of IBM. When the envelope from IBM arrived in the mail, Koshalek took wagers from his staff. Yea or nay? He held the envelope up to the light—impossible to tell. He finally opened it; a check for \$1 million fluttered out. Koshalek’s “forge ahead and the money will follow” strategy—or gamble—had turned to MOCA’s favor in the nick of time.

*Individuals* included works by great twentieth-century artists like Joseph Beuys, Richard Diebenkorn, Louise



Bourgeois, Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Ellsworth Kelly, Willem de Kooning, and George Herms. Brown also commissioned a solo project from Chris Burden during the run of the large exhibition. A magnet for press attention, Burden brilliantly melded conceptual and physical art and was known for testing his mental and physical limitations in a variety of media (including his 1971 performance *Shoot*, in which he arranged for a friend to shoot him in the arm with a rifle). His piece for MOCA challenged the physical limitations of the museum itself. It wasn't easy to secure a city permit for Burden's piece, which he titled *Exposing the Foundations of the Museum*. And he did just that, excavating an area of The TC's floor to expose the concrete footings of the warehouse, the dirt in which it was anchored. Visitors descended a stairway to view the guts of the museum. What was this place made of? Whom did it serve? How might the artist's act of altering the museum provoke questions and ideas in the spectator? At MOCA, the artist was at liberty to dig away at the definition and purpose of art and of the museum itself.

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The phrase, “a show that only MOCA could have done” could be applied to any number of the memorable thematic and monographic exhibits of the first twenty years, shows marked by intellectual and creative audacity, many of which posed installation and social challenges unique in the world of the museum. There were goldfish and birds to tend daily during the Edward Kienholz retrospective, and bees and beekeepers in *Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 90s*. For Ann Hamilton's installation *the capacity for absorption*, an entire room was covered in moss, which gallery workers gathered daily from a pond in Silver Lake. Presented in 2000, the last year of Koshalek's tenure at MOCA, the exhibition *At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture* (which staffers cheerfully referred to as *At the End of Our Sanity*) earned the rubric “only at MOCA” based on sheer scale (fifteen hundred artworks on loan) as well as the complexity of its assemblage.

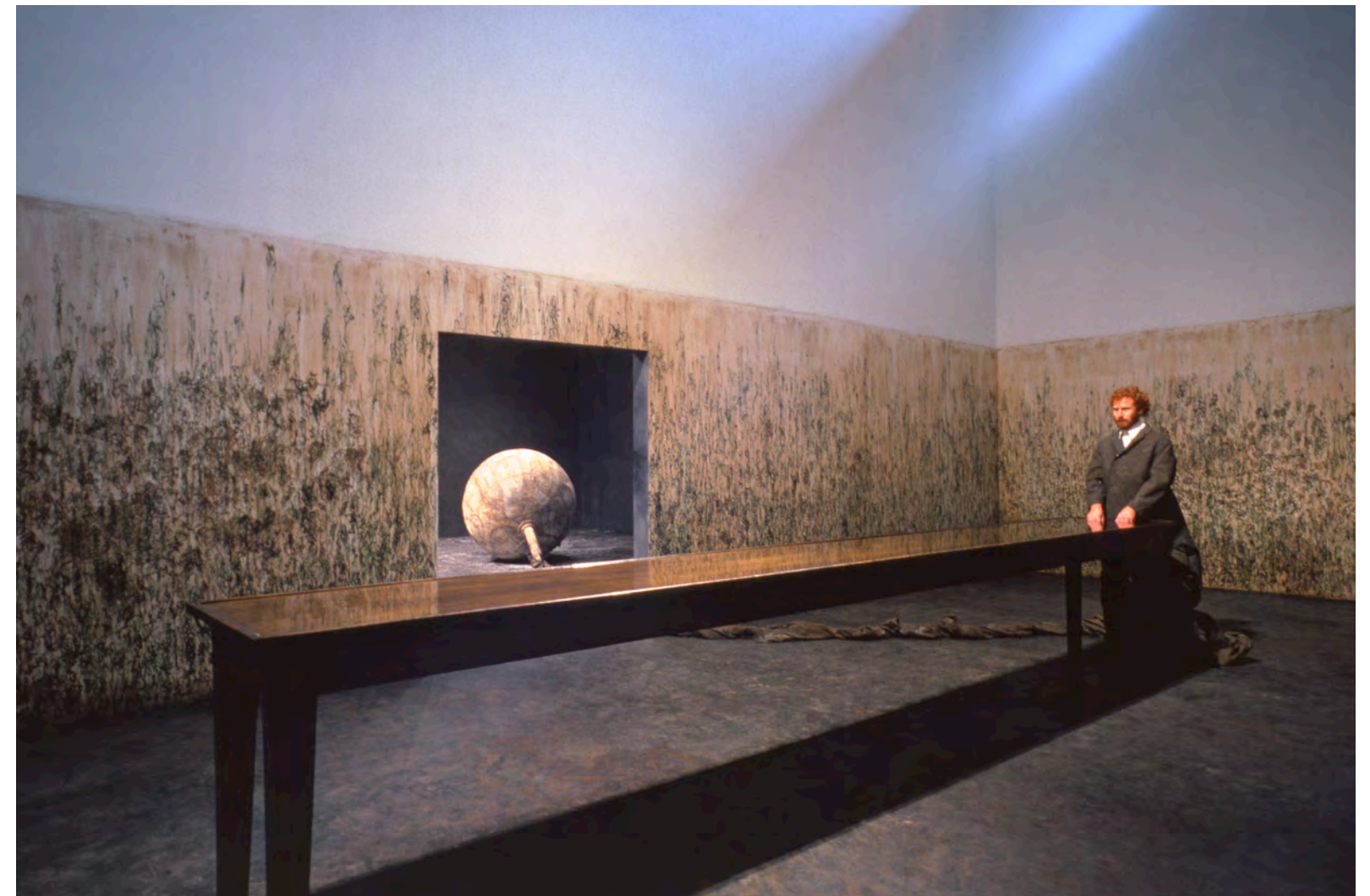
There were First Amendment upheavals, even death threats, when in 1997 Robert Gober constructed his life-size Madonna made of gray cement, her abdomen

pierced through by a steel culvert, that turned her, as Roberta Smith wrote in *The New York Times*, “into an eccentric crucifix at once shocking and grandly tragic.” Behind the figure, water cascaded down a staircase, “charging the atmosphere with moisture and sound.” The possible meanings of this highly personal piece, Smith continued, “are upstaged by its content, which concerns the transformative powers of love, forgiveness and revelation.” Finally, she wrote, “it is the clearest, strongest thing this influential, famously enigmatic artist ... has ever done.”

Paul Schimmel, who commissioned Gober's untitled Madonna piece, curated *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, a massive 1998 show that viewed the shift in postwar art from painting to more active and viscerally body-oriented works in relation to one work—Jackson Pollock's drip painting *Number 1, 1949*. *Out of Actions* heralded a time of increased mobility, when artists could travel internationally to an unprecedented degree. That change, along with the growth of mass media, meant that experiments of the avant-garde in New York might have immediate implications in Berlin, Rio, Osaka, Los Angeles, Krakow, Mexico City—and vice versa. Bold postwar creators utilized sound, movement, people, smoke, blood, and objects of all kinds in their artworks, leading artist Allan Kaprow to proclaim in his influential 1956 essay, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”: “The young artist of today need no longer say ‘I am a painter’ or ‘a poet’ or ‘a dancer.’ He is simply an ‘artist.’”

In the first gallery of the exhibition Pollock's masterpiece, *Number 1, 1949*, the ur-artwork, hung next to a monitor showing Hans Namuth's 1950 film of the artist “performing” his rhythmical dance of flinging, looping, and casting skeins of paint, underscoring how Pollock's physical act of creation was as significant to the future of art as the object itself. Subsequent galleries featured a display of documentation—via photos, videos, and objects, or more accurately, “relics”—of performative events by nearly one hundred fifty artists and collaboratives whose work had reverberated around the globe.

These included the Gutai group, founded in 1954 in Osaka by young artists reconsidering aesthetics in







Jackson Pollock, *Number 1*, 1949, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





Richard Serra works traversing the Panama Canal, 1998

post-surrender Japan, a country in the midst of a deep identity crisis. Their early works focused on marks on paper and canvas made from bodily movements, like smashing paint-filled bottles against canvas, painting with one's feet while hanging from a swing, crashing through paper screens, rolling in a pile of mud. There were videos and photos of the influential German artist Joseph Beuys, who, in 1974, performed an action titled *I Like America and America Likes Me*, in which the artist, wrapped in felt and bearing a shepherd's staff, spent four days in an enclosure with a wild coyote. Also documented was Yoko Ono's 1965 *Cut Piece*, in which she invited the audience at Carnegie Hall to cut away her clothing. From 1960s Brazil, artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica moved from painted abstraction to the body—to the self—as the canvas. They termed their innovations “experimental exercises in freedom,” per one manifesto. If there could be art with no object to be created, could there also be art without spectators to watch? Could art be, as Lygia Clark proposed, an exchange of “intimate psychology” between people? The inventive conceptual premise, the rigor of scholarship, and the breadth of artists included—in terms of both geographical spread and diversity of practice—lead Christopher Knight to proclaim that *Out of Actions* “was a show the likes of which you won't see even being attempted at other American museums.”

That same year, MOCA presented *Richard Serra Sculpture (1985-1998)*—the American sculptor's most comprehensive museum exhibition to date—curated by Koshalek and Julia Brown (by then a curator at the Guggenheim Museum). Seven of the nine massive sculptures were in the form of 13-foot-high weathered-steel torqued ellipses. Standing inside the mammoth forms that comprised *Torqued Ellipses* induced a sense of disorientation. As Serra remarked in an interview with critic David Sylvester, the giant forms “implicated you in their movement ... in order to understand their torque, you move, and as you move they move, so you're always trying to play catch-up with them ... like a dislocated jump-cut, in time.” Sylvester likened *Torqued Ellipses* to Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp: space itself turned into a substance.

The Serra exhibition, which Christopher Knight hailed as “a flat-out tour de force,” was no easy feat to pull off. “We had built the institution to the point where it had the

strength and the capacity to take on a show of immense scale and complexity,” Koshalek notes. “A constellation of architects, consultants, engineers, and MOCA staff were on hand to do what we promised the artist we could do.” The solid support of the MOCA board—particularly Fred Nicholas, Lenny Greenberg, Bill Kieschnick, and Betye Burton—was essential to the success of the show.

John Bowsher and registrar Robert Hollister master-minded the mind-boggling logistics of the colossal installation. Some of the steel sculptures, which filled the entire 55,000-foot space of The TC, began their journey to MOCA from a steel mill in Siegen, Germany, were then trucked to Antwerp in Belgium, from where they were shipped to California via the Panama Canal. Other steel sculptures were fabricated at Beth Ship, a rolling mill and shipyard in Maryland. The finished pieces were trucked westward across the continent after an advance team checked weight-bearing limits of all bridges en route. To install the seven weighty curved steel pieces that comprised *Torqued Ellipses*, John Bowsher's team removed and then rebuilt a large section of the north wall of The Temporary Contemporary. At the conclusion of the show, *Torqued Ellipses* was trucked to the Port of Los Angeles and loaded onto a freighter (too large to fit in the hold, the pieces were secured to the deck). From Los Angeles, onward to the Guggenheim Bilbao via the Panama Canal.

*Uncommon Sense*, organized in 1997 by Julie Lazar and Tom Finkelpearl, a MOCA curatorial fellow, featured projects by six artists whose work explored “social actions and art.” Several of the projects probed the relations between the artist, the subjects, the museum, and public communities—both as participants and viewers. Mierle Laderman Ukeles (who became the official, unsalaried, artist-in-residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation) created an homage to Pennsylvania Hall, Philadelphia's monument to free speech, built in 1838 by a coalition of two thousand women, African Americans, and abolitionists. Four days after its inauguration, the building was incinerated by an anti-abolitionist mob. The story of the fire held Ukeles's fascination for years. As soon as she stepped into The TC, experienced its openness, the quality of its natural light, she knew at once, she told Kristine McKenna in the *L.A. Times*, “this was the place to unburn Freedom Hall.”



For *Unburning Freedom Hall*, Ukeles worked directly with City of L.A. sanitation workers, street maintenance crews, and firefighters from two different firehouses. “One of the tragedies of L.A.’s civil disturbance of 1992,” she told McKenna, “was the rupture in the contract between city workers and the public; firefighters were attacked, streets were trashed, sanitation workers couldn’t pick up the garbage.” Ukeles shared the story of Freedom Hall with the workers and students, then invited them to make what she called “Unburnings”—small personal artworks created inside glass jars. Over a thousand people ultimately made individual “Unburnings” for the artist’s installation, which included six hundred tons of crushed glass, representing the shattered halls of the Philadelphia building, surrounding a “meeting table” (a halo of glass suspended from the ceiling, 36 feet above by stainless steel cables). There were seats for eighteen people at the table. Local “peacebuilders” were invited to gather at the table to discuss different ways to conceive and celebrate peace: peace in the family, interracial peace, inner peace, interreligious peace, and, in a session lead by John Vickers, a fire department captain whose station was located a few blocks from the site of the 1992 Rodney King beating, public service as peacebuilding.

Rick Lowe, another artist in the show (which also included Karen Finley, Mel Chin, Cornerstone Theater, and the artist team of Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom), was known for creating *Project Row Houses*, a visionary public art project begun in 1993 that transformed Houston’s historic Third Ward—one of that city’s oldest African American neighborhoods. Lowe framed *Project Row Houses* within a context of “social sculpture,” a term coined in the 1970s by Joseph Beuys. Lowe defined his work as “shaping and molding community as a sculptural form.”

Lowe had originally trained as a painter. He had studied at Texas Southern University (originally Texas State University for Negroes), where he was influenced by founding chairman of the art department, John Thomas Biggers, a leading twentieth-century muralist. Biggers, who had traveled widely in West Africa, embedded images drawn from African archetypes into the murals he painted on Houston’s shotgun houses, showing these neighborhoods to be places of pride and community, not poverty and crime.

Lowe’s own migration out of the studio into community-based art began in 1990, when he invited some Houston high-school students for a visit. As Lowe explained the current social issues he was grappling with in the work, his young visitors walked around his studio examining the billboard-size paintings-in-progress. One student was decidedly unimpressed. “If you’re an artist,” he challenged Lowe, “why don’t you come up with some kind of creative solution to issues instead of just telling people like me what we already know?” Out of that defining encounter, Lowe began to reconsider what it meant to be a truly political artist. How could he connect directly with the African American community?

When MOCA invited Lowe to Los Angeles in 1997, he visited the Watts Towers Arts Center (artist Noah Purifoy was among its founders, in 1964), where its director, Mark Greenfield, pointed out the dilapidated houses across the street. Lowe decided that’s where he’d invest his energy for *Uncommon Sense*. He began developing a plan for artist-in-residence spaces in Watts. For the exhibition at The TC, he constructed a small shotgun house out of plywood, in which visitors could view plans and written proposals to convert similar houses around Watts Towers. Lowe lived part-time in Watts for several years, working to make the program self-sustaining. Out of those original efforts evolved the Watts House Project, a non-profit that partnered artists and architects with community members to develop creative restoration and cultural programs for the neighborhood. “Manipulating paint has no allure for me whatsoever anymore,” Lowe told McKenna, “because I’ve come to see myself as an artist who uses the community as a medium. Interaction with people is what feels creative to me now.”

It was a remarkable range of exhibitions—in theme, in concept, in subject—that MOCA presented in those first twenty years. The material and financial requirements of production as well as aesthetic concerns varied dramatically: from Serra’s mammoth steel structures—some transported halfway around the world—to an exhibit like *Uncommon Sense*, where sanitation workers and fire captains gathered in the museum for roundtable peace talks. From the beginning of his tenure at MOCA, Koshalek was committed to engaging a multiplicity of

voices in developing exhibitions. By contrast, at the Walker, where Koshalek first worked as a curator, it had been that museum’s charismatic and effective director—Martin Friedman—who made all the important decisions: selecting exhibition themes and artists, assigning curators, commissioning catalogue essays. Though Koshalek greatly admired his mentor, he hewed to another method. At MOCA, curators had wide latitude to conceive and to produce shows that originated from their own passions and interests. “We all believed deeply in the artists we worked with,” Alma Ruiz remarked. “Everything was possible.”

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Koshalek attended curatorial meetings, mentored, offered suggestions, lent support, gave free rein. In December 1989, he suggested to Julie Lazar, who had championed a number of emerging artists, that she develop a project with an artist who had already played a critical role in shaping ideas about contemporary art. Lazar knew right away who she wanted to invite, an artist who did not limit himself to a single aesthetic or discipline, someone, she wrote, “who consistently ventured as close to the threshold of transformation as any artist in the twentieth century.” To her surprise, John Cage was listed in the Manhattan phone book. Within minutes of picking up the receiver, Cage said yes to “it,” even though neither artist nor curator knew what “it” would be.

Lazar flew to New York for a first visit, bearing as gifts a prickly cactus and a pair of hand-carved wooden spoons. Cage and Lazar clicked. Their inclinations aligned. “He was interested in all the disciplines and so was I,” Lazar says. “He put me at ease.” Over the next three years, artist and curator conferred, often at the dining-room table in the giant loft at Sixth Avenue and Seventeenth Street that Cage shared with Merce Cunningham, his longtime life and artistic partner.

Cage was interested in breaking down the barriers between genres. He was a composer; he was also a musical theorist, a visual artist, a philosopher, and an avid mushroom forager. Searching for mushrooms was a way to appreciate silence and engage with chance. I once hunted mushrooms with him in Seattle’s Discovery Park on a cloudy day that became a torrential downpour,

which diminished Cage’s childlike enthusiasm and wonder not one iota. His was a voracious curiosity.

From the start of his career Cage had experimented with chance and indeterminacy as ways to remove the ego from the creative process and to break habitual patterns of behavior and thought. Music could include the sounds of everyday life. Theater could be any art form that spanned time. A choreographer could find new patterns of movement by sequencing with a roll of dice for the *I Ching*. Many artists who took Cage’s experimental composition course at the New School in 1956 were rule breakers themselves who went on to create Happenings, assemblages, and early performance art before these forms had a label. They included Allan Kaprow (whom Cage met while on a mushroom hunt and invited to join the class), as well as Jackson Mac Low, Al Hansen, George Brecht, and Dick Higgins, who went on to co-found the Neo-Dada movement Fluxus. (Fluxus artists, Higgins explained in an essay, thought of Cage and Duchamp as “uncles of Fluxus.”)

Cage was born in 1912 at Good Samaritan Hospital downtown, not far from where I’m writing. His father, John, was an optimistic inventor, his mother, Lucretia, known for her wit, was a society-page editor for the *L.A. Times*. A significant part of Cage’s artistic coming-of-age took place in greater Los Angeles, which accounted for his “California stubbornness and self-invention,” according to Kay Larson’s biography *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists*.

Cage dropped out of Pomona College after just two years to wander in Paris, studying Picasso, Klee, and other modernists, and to play music scores by Paul Hindemith and Igor Stravinsky, among others. When the Depression depleted his parents’ ability to help support him in Paris, Cage returned to Los Angeles by way of Cuba. By 1932, he was living in a small cottage in an auto court in Santa Monica, rent free in exchange for doing the gardening.

Figuring he had a saleable skill, Cage decided to knock on doors in the neighborhood, offering lectures on art and music to housewives, ten lessons for \$2.50. He explored the city and connected with other young



artists, poets, dancers, and architects, who drifted in and out at all hours at an ongoing salon hosted by Pauline Schindler, wife of the architect Rudolf Schindler, at their home on Kings Road in West Hollywood. Cage, notes Larson, “had a knack for finding the vanguard wherever it was,” as well as an “extraordinary ability to create his own favorable circumstances.” At a party in the Hollywood Hills home of salonista Galka Scheyer, Cage was introduced to her neighbors, Walter and Louise Arensberg.

Cage wanted to study composition with Arnold Schoenberg, the influential Austrian-born émigré composer and music theorist who had settled in Los Angeles. Unable to afford one-on-one sessions with the master, Cage talked his way into Schoenberg’s home anyway. He ended up studying with him for two years—privately as well as by auditing classes at UCLA and USC. The two men ultimately differed in their approach to traditional harmony, which Cage likened at one point to the ills of Western capitalism. Cage, as it turned out, was more interested in sound (and silence) than he was in music. At one point, Schoenberg warned his student that his distaste for harmony would likely hinder his career as a composer. Nonplussed, Cage extracted his own conclusion from this impasse with Schoenberg, one that remained at the heart of his art-making for the rest of his life: “What can be analyzed in my work, or criticized, are the questions that I ask.”

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The artistic offspring of John Cage and Julie Lazar’s three-year collaboration was called *Rolywholyover A Circus*, which opened at the Isozaki building in 1993.

A James Joyce-concocted word, *rolywholyover* appears toward the end of Joyce’s epic comedy *Finnegan’s Wake*, following the tenth thunderclap (“thunderclaps are a history of civilization’s technology,” Joyce declared). Lazar later wrote that at the moment she and Cage decided on the title, Cage grabbed his Viking edition off the bookshelf and nearly sang the paragraph:

*Soe? La! Lamfader’s arm it has cocoincidences. YHou mean to see we have been hadding a sound night’s sleep? You may so. It is just, it is just about to, it is just about to rolywholyover. Svapsvap. Of all the strange*

*things that ever not even in the hundrund and badst pageans of unthowsent and won’t nice or in eddas and oddes bokes of tomb, dyke and hollow to be have happened! The untireties of livesliving being the one substance of streamsbecoming.*

The title also fit with their sense that Los Angeles, Cage’s birthplace, “exemplified Joyce’s poetic observation of *streamsbecoming*, with its growing population, converging cultures, and constantly changing environment,” said Lazar. “The title *Rolywholyover A Circus* fit with the project wonderfully and was thereby chosen.”

They called *Rolywholyover* a circus because it would be constantly changing. Three galleries represented the three rings. What was featured on any given day and where said objects were placed was determined by consulting the *I Ching*, or *Chinese Book of Changes* (or, rather, a computer score adapted from its principles).

Cage invited one hundred thirty museums within a thirty-mile radius of MOCA to submit a list of ten objects that they would be willing to lend from their permanent collections for the project. No theme or other criterion was provided. Twenty-one museums responded and submitted lists, including the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, The Museum of Jurassic Technology, and the California African American Museum. “The result,” wrote critic Roberta Smith in *The New York Times*, “was one of the strangest, most evocative exhibitions you may ever see, a grandly precarious, nonhierarchic symphony of cultural endeavor.” Being in the exhibit, wrote Christopher Knight, “was like rattling around inside the artist’s head.”

If you attended *Rolywholyover* one day, you might see Jacob Epstein’s bronze bust of George Bernard Shaw, on loan from the Huntington, installed next to Ingrid Bergman’s bustier from the Frederick’s of Hollywood Lingerie Museum. You might find an Ellsworth Kelly painting installed high overhead on the wall. “John had a big complaint that art in museums was installed at eye level,” Lazar notes, “and was boring.” Random determinants might stipulate that a river rock be awarded the same import of placement as Ad Reinhardt’s *Number 16* (1947), which might end up sitting next to a gutted TV console with a burned-out candle (by Nam June Paik) or





a manhole cover. “I think that it’s very beautiful,” Cage remarked to Lazar as they plotted out the exhibition. “You can’t imagine how exciting it is to see a stuffed bird next to a Roman coin; you immediately see them both afresh.” The ghosts of Walter and Louise Arensberg would, no doubt, have approved.

In the center of the first gallery were tables and chairs where you could sit and read, or hang out and play chess. (Cage was a devoted student of the game and had famously played with Duchamp.) There were moveable cabinets whose drawers contained books from Cage’s own library, facsimiles of paintings and poems that you could read, handle. You could play at an interactive computer installation, manipulating blocks of texts to create unexpected poetry. One object that did not budge was a glass vitrine that displayed an autographed copy of the journal of Henry David Thoreau, one of Cage’s guiding lights. The journal was open to a page that featured a drawing of a single feather. That same feather appeared in one of Cage’s delicate calligraphic drawings, displayed on the wall nearby.

The installation-in-flux required the unprecedented participation of the entire museum staff, who became an integral part of the exhibition: that included curators, registrars, security officers, preparators. To follow Cage’s chance-derived score, each day they read and interpreted a detailed computerized printout that indicated locations for the art, the moveable walls, the sound stations, the chairs, and then carried out these dictates within designated chance-derived overlapping time slots. “When I am working with others,” Cage noted, “I like that our relationship is apolitical and anarchic.”

The heaviest responsibility fell to John Bowsher, who kept it all moving, taking care that no object—and there were many valuable artworks in the exhibit—was damaged. “John listened a great deal and didn’t say much,” Alma Ruiz remembers. “He always figured it out.” Tools of the process, like ladders and hammers, even nail holes in the walls, were ever present as the installation went through its daily changes. One ticket purchase allowed the visitor multiple visits, and no one saw the same exhibition twice.

Perhaps critic John Henken had eaten some magic mushrooms when he wrote this expansive summation of *Rolywholyover* in the *Los Angeles Times*: “This buoyantly engaging show lets you feel and experience your relative place in the cosmos—at once minuscule, a speck, a humble bit of dust somewhere on a grid among countless others, as well as a moving center of consciousness, poised to be stunned, amused, appalled and delighted by your ever-changing position. In a century notable for global cataclysm, genocidal holocausts and the capacity for total annihilation, this significant bit of experiential wisdom is not a mean artistic achievement.”

After MOCA, *Rolywholyover* traveled to four other venues: The Menil Collection in Houston; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Soho in New York; Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Center in Tokyo; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Each museum agreed to the conditions of exhibition, to using chance, that “unpredictable anathema to the museum’s rational process,” in the words of critic Sandra Skurvida. The exhibition varied from museum to museum and of course, in each museum, it varied from day to day. As in Los Angeles, each presenting museum extended an invitation to other arts venues in the vicinity to offer their adjunct programming—performances, lectures, concerts, screenings on or about John Cage and his contemporaries—making *Rolywholyover* A Circus a city-wide festival wherever it went.

If Chris Burden exposed the foundations of the museum and Michael Asher claimed title to the lobby, *Rolywholyover* offered perhaps the most radical of institutional critiques, taking aim at the system of hierarchical judgment central to running virtually every museum in the world. What object gets prominence? What is a masterpiece? What is worthy of our attention? Whose work matters? Cage subverted the curator’s role in defining artistic standards in favor of working as collaborators with life itself. *Rolywholyover* upended the very word *exhibition*. Lazar recently commented, “What got me through the many difficult obstacles we had to face producing the project was John’s great sense of humor and his positive attitude about the future.”

In August of 1992, two years into their collaboration and a year before the show was to open at MOCA, Lazar received a call from Laura Kuhn, then Cage’s assistant (now director of the John Cage Trust), who informed her that “John was very pleased with their progress on the Circus.” Kuhn had just left Cage’s loft, where he’d been preparing a pitcher of iced tea for Merce Cunningham, before returning to his checklist of compositions for inclusion in the show. (The final checklist comprised approximately one hundred sixty works by sixty-seven artists, with additional memorabilia in moveable file cabinets.)

A few hours later, Lazar received a second call from Laura Kuhn. “I remember that there had been a thunderstorm in New York. I remember that Laura asked me to sit down before she went on. She told me that Merce had come home to find John collapsed on the floor in front of the sink.”

Cage was rushed by ambulance to the hospital with a brain aneurism. He never woke up. When Kuhn returned to the loft with Cunningham, she found the fully edited list of compositions Cage had been working on for *Rolywholyover*. “So on the day he collapsed,” Lazar told me, “he was working on our Circus and preparing a cool drink for Merce. I found out later that a nurse recorded John’s heartbeats. I’ve often thought how musical they must have been.”

Lazar arrived in New York the next day to help out. “We were sitting around a wooden table in the loft when I noticed the shiny silver metal box—the prototype for our catalogue. I opened it and discovered that it was full of John’s favorite homemade almond cookies. We’d already planned to include the recipe along with other macrobiotic dishes in the Circus box. So we three, Merce, Laura, and I, ate John’s last cookies together in silence. It was a very moving experience.”

Forty pieces from Cage’s personal collection had already been selected for the show. Lazar was worried that removing them from the loft so soon after Cage’s passing would prove distressing, but Cunningham not only gave his permission for the works to be included, he flew to Los Angeles for the opening night of

*Rolywholyover* at MOCA. “You’ve captured John’s spirit,” he told Lazar.

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During these months of pandemic lockdown, I have found that immersing in John Cage’s prophetic writing and philosophy, his generosity, his wild imagination—is a restorative tonic. In the mornings, I read from his *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*, jotting down phrases pertinent to the moment: “City planning’s obsolete. What’s needed is global planning so Earth may stop stepping like an octopus on its own feet.”

I was eager to get a sense of what *Rolywholyover* at MOCA looked like. As there was no catalogue available in the Los Angeles Public Library, I ordered a copy through a used art book distributor. When it arrived, I excitedly tore open the big padded envelope. It wasn’t the explanatory tome I’d expected. Instead, the package yielded a silver metal tin, its shiny cover reflecting my puzzled face. Inside the box was a jumble of ephemera, good stuff: Cage’s essay “Anarchy” (“Private prospect of enlightenment’s no longer sufficient. Not just self—but social—realization.”), notes from other philosophers and curators, reproductions of Cage’s drawings and paintings by some of his favorite artists (Morris Graves, Arshile Gorky, Mark Tobey), musical scores, an excerpt from Thoreau’s journal, and macrobiotic recipes (Tibetan barley bread, almond thumbprint cookies).

The box was itself a composition, one I was free to arrange, re-arrange, review in any order that appealed to me. Come to think of it, I could even perform one of Cage’s seminal (non) compositions, by simply giving my full attention to the silence and/or sounds around me for a specified amount of time. That’s what Cage did in 1952, with his composition 4’33”, instructing musicians to play nothing at all for the specified duration of the title—much to the chagrin of music critics. He called the piece “the absence of intended sounds.” I stepped outside my office into the garden, took a breath, then stood still and just listened for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Shrill cries of a pair of Cooper’s hawks in the branches of a distant eucalyptus. Silence. A helicopter whirring in the pale sky overhead. Fade out. Hoot of



a train whistle from far across the L.A. River. Though decades have passed since the exhibition, I could still participate in *Rolywholyover*.

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I keep thinking about the way John Cage worked on his art to the last minute of his life, and the way MOCA honored that singular artist’s vision. One might even consider *Rolywholyover* a paradigm for characterizing MOCA’s first two decades. It began with a commitment to say yes to “it” when it wasn’t clear yet what “it” was. Similar ingredients: risk, chaos, boldness—chance, trust, certainly luck. The buoyant optimism of the artist (and the museum director) sustaining the team through trials and tribulations. The right place at the right time. Reinventing the idea of a museum in a city that is constantly reinventing itself. An atmosphere of “anything is possible” that charges creative people with a special fervor, an invitation to be free, to ask questions about things that people have stopped questioning, about meaning, structure, habit, and purpose. “Perseverance furthers,” says the *I Ching*.

I open the lid of the shiny tin box and sift again through the contents. And then I consume, in a holy silence, the almond thumbprint cookies I baked yesterday from John Cage’s recipe. They are delicious.



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L-R: Julie Lazar, Elizabeth Koshalek, Richard Koshalek, and Merce Cunningham



## WHY SHOULD ART HAVE TO FIT INTO FOUR WALLS?

—Richard Koshalek



# A TALE OF TWO BUILDINGS, ONE DIRECTOR, AND THE MUSEUM IN THE EXPANDED FIELD

Speaking in a monotone to a dozen journalists on the patio of the Los Angeles Press Club, Japanese architect Arata Isozaki showed no emotion as he unveiled his design for the new museum in January 1982. Surprisingly he couldn't quite summon any adjectives to describe the model for The Museum of Contemporary Art, his first project in the United States. "Maybe industrial," he said. The structure looked neutral.

After a few desultory questions, the journalists—armed now with bland quotes and anodyne statistics about square footage and costs—closed their notebooks and left the courtyard of the vintage Spanish Colonial Revival building, ready to report on the anti-climactic structure that would house Los Angeles's long-awaited, much-delayed answer to New York's Museum of Modern Art.

I stayed on—underwhelmed and perplexed at the non-event that had just occurred—and approached Isozaki with a question. As the architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, I had found the presentation model and plans uninteresting, remarkable only for the design's lack of the civic presence that would be expected for a major public institution on a major downtown boulevard. The unnecessary steel cross-bracing on the glass facades of the boxy office annex, for example, was a cliché, and anemic.

I had noticed three models sitting like question marks on pedestals behind Isozaki in the shade of the patio's ficus trees. I asked Isozaki about them.

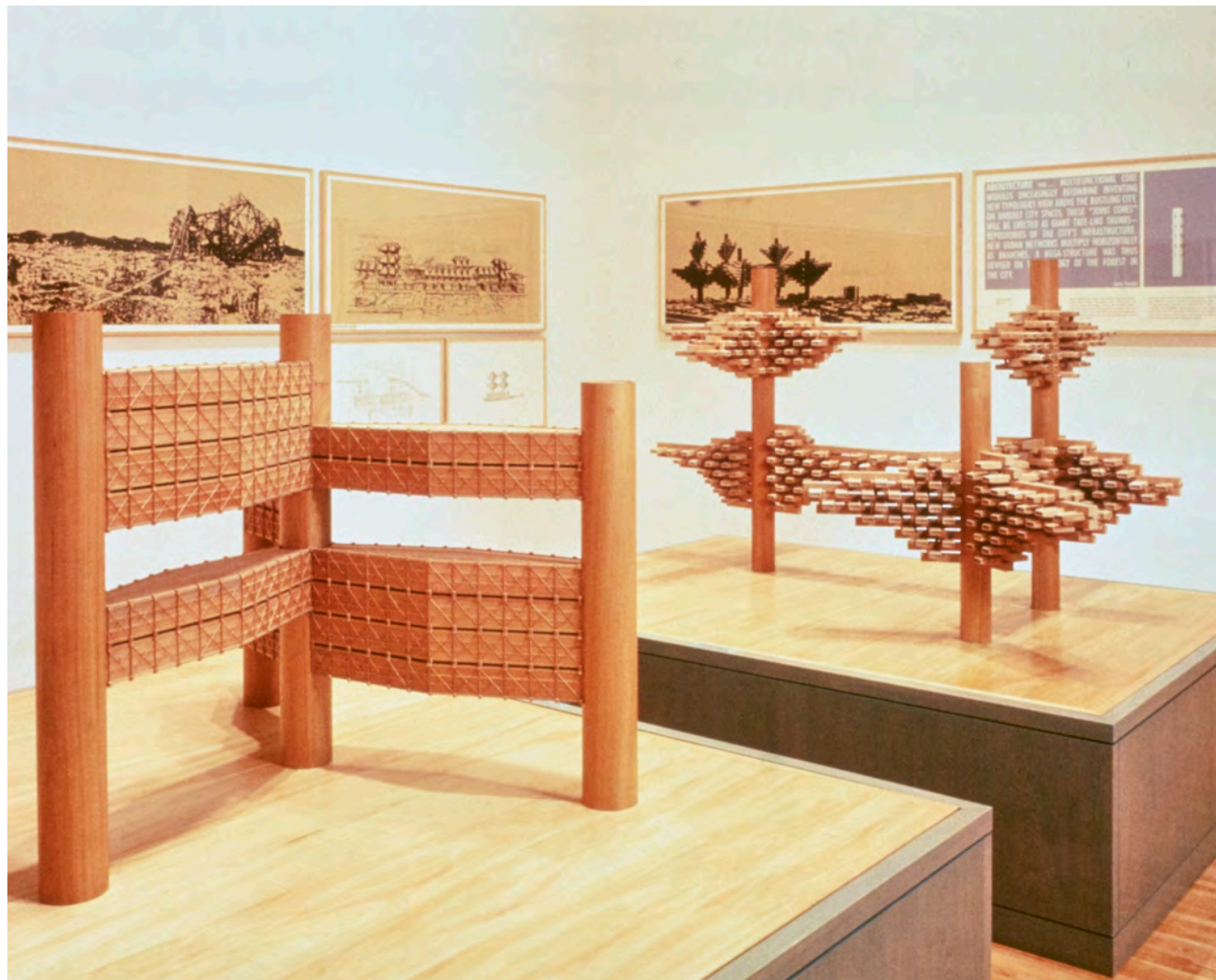
The dispirited—depressed, actually—architect lit up. We walked over to the models. With an animation that sprang out of nowhere, he described the schemes. The most promising was a Platonic essay of cubes and prisms with pyramidal skylights, and a squared elevated block, cranked off the orthogonal, housing a library and boardroom. Surprisingly, he criticized the design he had just presented to my fellow journalists as "static."

I suggested we talk further another day, elsewhere.

Without realizing it, I was about to pull on a thread that would unravel not only the neutral "industrial" design but also precipitate a realignment of the power structure of the new museum. The design, it turned out, was the battlefield over which MOCA directors, trustees, and Los Angeles cultural figures were circling for position and power like sumo wrestlers. Isozaki and his design were pawns in a tense and acrimonious struggle.

During a series of interviews mostly in Santa Monica coffee shops near the hotel where he stayed, Isozaki opened up, in halting but understandable English. He spoke from exasperation and frustration. He had been on the verge of resigning and clearly felt he had little to lose.





Arata Isozaki 1960/1990 Architecture, 1991, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

## ISOZAKI GOT THE JOB, BUT SOMEHOW LOS ANGELES WASN'T GETTING AN ISOZAKI BUILDING.

Reflecting on the impasse, he remembered he had been chosen because the museum's Architecture Committee told him it wanted a "portrait architect."

"At first I wondered what that could mean—'portrait architect,'" he said. Finally he realized that the committee sought an architect who, like a society portrait painter, would produce a design in the image the committee wanted. Among them were monied patrons accustomed to hearing "yes." An institution conceived as a celebration of contemporary art was telling its first commissioned artist what to do. They wanted his name and international prestige, but not his design.

Despite his infallibly polite, apparently submissive demeanor, Isozaki—just by speaking to me—was resisting the committee, but at a remove that did not require direct confrontation. Distance empowered him. At one of our sessions, in a teasing declaration of suddenly acquired strength, he raised both arms and flexed his biceps like a muscleman.

The thread quickly led me into a political minefield that involved some of the city's most prominent civic figures and artists. With his million-dollar start-up contribution to the fledgling institution, businessman and philanthropist Eli Broad was named chairman of the board. In a handshake deal reportedly made during a walk on the beach—an understanding that would itself become the subject of a lawsuit—Broad had promised Max Palevsky, another businessman and philanthropist who made a million-dollar contribution, control of the museum's Architecture Committee.

I could no longer just write the story as a critic assessing a design. I had to become an investigative journalist developing credible sources beyond Isozaki. My sources came to include, among others, a Deep Throat, who reliably informed me about what was happening in the innermost sanctums of decision making, the Board of Directors, and the Architecture Committee itself.

Six internationally prominent architects had been considered by Palevsky's committee, formed in 1981. Its members included Los Angeles artists Sam Francis and Robert Irwin, MOCA's director Pontus Hultén, deputy director Richard Koshalek, and architectural designer Coy Howard (who was introduced to the group by Irwin). Developer Fred Nicholas, a friend of Palevsky's, would eventually join the committee.

There would be no building costs. In a brilliant stroke of civic insight and bureaucratic initiative, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) proposed that a site within its mega-block California Plaza project, which had recently been awarded to a developer, be dedicated to the museum, its building to be financed with the mandated 1.5%-for-art budget (paid by the developer). From the CRA's point of view, the fledgling MOCA could bring sorely needed cultural energy to a business-heavy downtown that lacked a cultural dimension.

Frank Gehry was on the short list of potential architects, but at a dinner party hosted by industrialist Norton Simon for Dorothy Chandler, an owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, the blunt Palevsky called a prize-winning Gehry house in Malibu "a piece of shit." Gehry was sitting at the table. So Gehry—despite his strong ties to the artist



community and his rising career—understood he was out of the running. The committee wanted the prestige of an architect with an established international reputation, and the pre-Bilbao Gehry didn’t qualify. Koshalek recalls Palevsky saying, “Frank knows he’s not going to get this job. He’s not capable of doing this job. But we’re going to put him in there as a token California architect and Frank understands that.”

Palevsky put forward New York architect Richard Meier, while Sam Francis, deeply influenced by Japanese culture, advocated for Isozaki and convinced his friend Hultén to back him. Other architects on the short list included Edward Larrabee Barnes, Kevin Roche, and James Stirling.

Isozaki got the job, but somehow Los Angeles wasn’t getting an Isozaki building. He was an architect who had created heroic, monumental, often witty buildings—designs he sometimes characterized as “perfect crimes.” In “Dispute over Design for the Museum of Contemporary Art”—the first of my four 1982 articles in the *Herald Examiner* on the controversy—I exposed the mediocrity of the standing design and the architect’s compromised position. Because Isozaki himself told me that the design was not his, I asked in print, “Who, if not Isozaki, designed the building?”

The dominant members of the Architecture Committee.

The committee was split between Palevsky, Howard, and Irwin on one side, and Hultén, Koshalek, and Francis on the other. Palevsky had enough power with his cohorts to reject Isozaki’s original design (the one with Platonic forms that was among the three marginalized models at the Press Club), a surprise because the design had been approved by the CRA, and by Cadillac Fairview, the developer of California Plaza, the billion-dollar mixed-use redevelopment project on Bunker Hill. As part of the deal, the CRA and Cadillac Fairview had agreed with MOCA to allow a free-standing building on the site designed by an architect other than the architect of California Plaza, Arthur Erickson. The developer required, however, that half the volume of the 100,000-square-foot building be buried below grade and that the remaining volume above grade be cut in half to allow a view

corridor and pedestrian access from Grand Avenue to the shopping in the high-rise buildings behind. Isozaki accepted the condition, saying he would work within the constraints and not design a building with the “strong gesture” that until then was typical of his work.

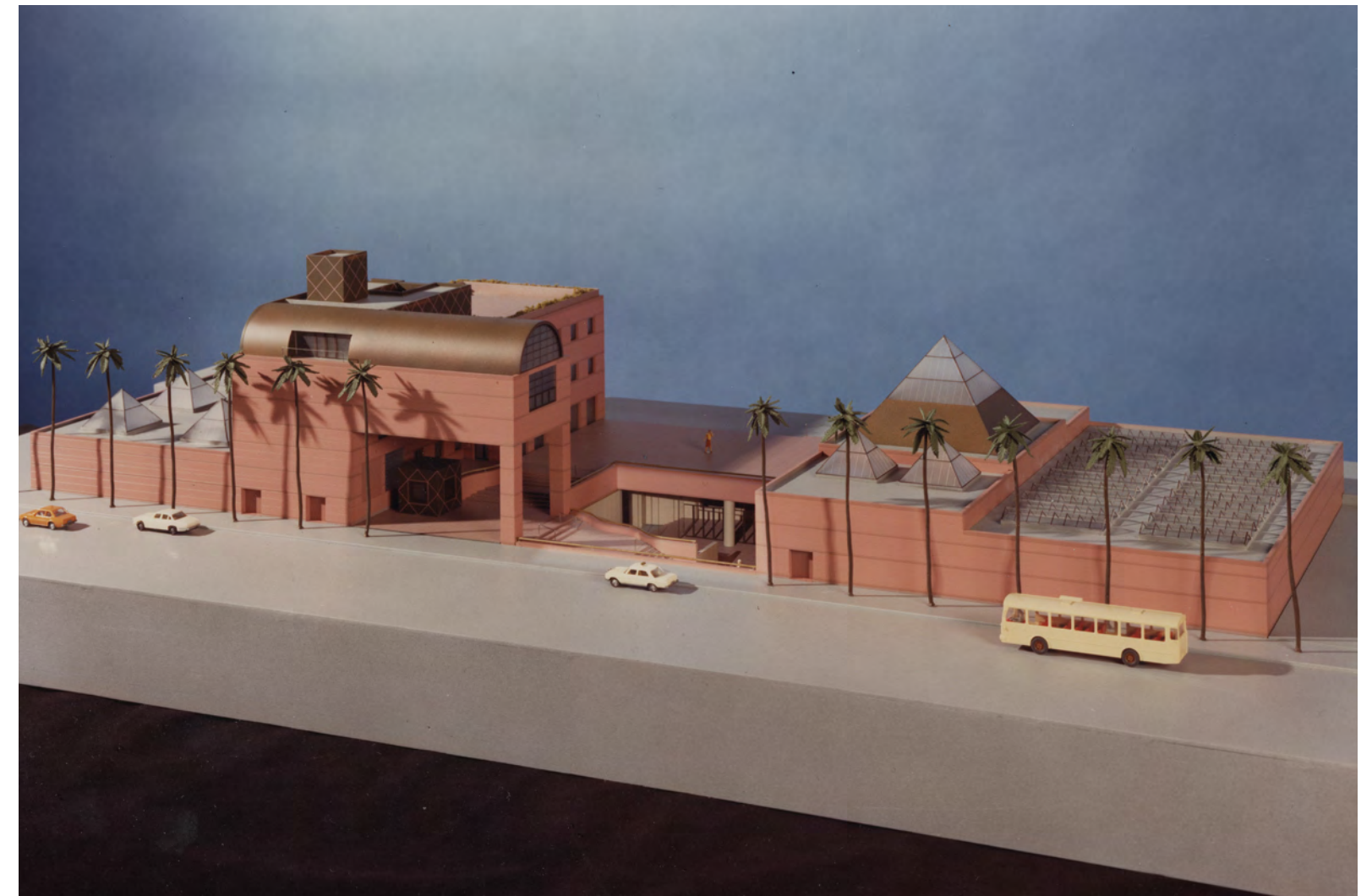
Both Cadillac Fairview and the CRA had veto rights over the design, but, despite their approval, the Architecture Committee forced Isozaki to abandon his approved scheme in favor of the neutral warehouse concept that he presented at the Press Club: “Otherwise I had to quit ... or be fired,” Isozaki told me.

In public statements, Palevsky said the committee was looking for a “neutral” building that would “disappear” and not compete with the art, despite the fact that half the building had already disappeared underground, and the other half was halved, its profile reduced. Hultén, proving more conservative than his bona fides as a former director of the Pompidou Center would suggest, said, “Architecture is not gimmicks,” referring to the rotated axis of one section of Isozaki’s design: the architect was asked to straighten out this mild-mannered crank. The committee wanted strict simplicity and the right angle.

By now, my friend and fellow architecture critic John Dreyfuss at the *Los Angeles Times* began covering the turmoil. John told me that editors kept putting my articles on his desk, prodding him. The controversy quickly ballooned. We pursued our stories independently, but I had a Deep Throat and also a second very well-informed back-up source.

The disagreement about the design came to a head at an Architecture Committee meeting in Palevsky’s office when Coy Howard took the floor and suggested ideas for a redesign, effectively inserting himself into the process in front of Isozaki and his clients. Deeply offended, Isozaki walked out of the meeting. Koshalek raced after him and caught up with Isozaki on Westwood Boulevard, asking him to come back, offering reassurances of a reasonable solution.

Isozaki was allowed to develop his original design, and he returned to Japan. The battle, however, continued, along





with uncertainty about the design and even the status of Isozaki's position. Palevsky and Robert Irwin flew east to look at prominent museums and shop for design details. I reached Palevsky on his research trip and asked if he still thought the building exterior should be "neutral" and "secondary," as he had previously stated in public. "People will come to see the art, not the building," he confirmed. Did Isozaki continue to be the principal architect? "Well, all that's now under discussion ... We're not prepared to discuss things publicly now," he said.

With storm clouds gathering, I contacted Eli Broad, head of the Executive Committee, who took my call, telling me, "I think what you're doing is very destructive to the museum."

"I'm only reporting what the trustees are doing," I replied.

When I asked Coy Howard whether there were discussions about firing Isozaki, he said, "I guess we talked about it."

A failure in Los Angeles, either by resignation or dismissal, would have caused Isozaki to lose face in Japan: he was one of the few Japanese architects of his, or any, generation, with a high-profile commission in the United States. His dismissal would have been equally disastrous for MOCA. Hultén, Koshalek, and Francis threatened to resign should Isozaki be dismissed. Losing the architect after a high-profile search, and then losing the directors over the dismissal, would have precipitated a crisis of confidence in the museum, and its probable collapse. The art community was only too aware of the closure of the Pasadena Art Museum several years before. MOCA could well repeat that setback, putting an end to the prospect of a museum of contemporary art in Los Angeles for a generation.

I continued to cover the ongoing disputes in the *Herald*, as did the *L.A. Times*, with a cumulative impact that distressed the controversy-averse board, composed now of corporate executives and patrons accustomed to settling matters quietly. Palevsky advised overlooking the "local critics," and to wait for *The New York Times* to weigh in. In fact the *Times*'s critic, Paul Goldberger, did jump in and called me for information. I gave him all the

results I had obtained from my interviews among a half-dozen sources, including Deep Throat, Isozaki, Frank Gehry, and others. The information formed the armature of an article he soon published. His piece took Isozaki's side.

After returning from Japan, Isozaki presented a refined version of his original scheme at a meeting of the full board in Eli Broad's office adjacent to the Santa Monica Freeway, addressing objections that had previously been raised. But in a follow-up meeting the next day, Palevsky asked the board to dismiss Isozaki and hire Coy Howard. He pointed to Koshalek, saying, "You're the reason for a lot of this goddamn trouble!" Heated arguments ensued, and Rocco Siciliano, a distinguished business and civic leader who had served under four U.S. presidents, called for a vote to "end this masochism." With a single abstention (Eli Broad), the board voted seventeen to three and overwhelmingly confirmed Isozaki as the architect. (Fred Nicholas had telephoned board members behind the scenes to assure support.)

Carl Hartnack, the chairman of Security Pacific Bank, placed his hand on Palevsky's arm and said that, as head of the bank, he had officiated over the construction of a fifty-five-story tower on Bunker Hill without any of the trauma, press, and turbulence afflicting MOCA. "Max, it's all over, you're relieved of your duties as the head of this committee."

Palevsky got up and left. He later sued MOCA for the return of his million dollars.

The thread that started at the Los Angeles Press Club ended up displacing the "official" design with the model Isozaki had tucked behind him during the press conference. It also unraveled the dysfunctional power structure of the Architecture Committee. The cathartic meeting at Broad's office corrected course and reset the museum's compass. Palevsky's General Patton style of command gave way to the more cooperative style of Fred Nicholas. The immediate result was that the Architecture Committee assumed a protective and supportive rather than a competitive and antagonistic relationship to the architect. As a developer, Nicholas brought managerial and organizational skills to the project. Trained as a

lawyer, he respected not only Isozaki but also the directors for their own professional skills. The professionals in the room were now treated as equals, not subordinates. Nicholas stabilized the museum by guiding the committee that had been the point of origin for the controversies disrupting the fledgling museum. Nicholas worked closely with Koshalek, MOCA's first employee Sherri Geldin, museum planner Marcy Goodwin, and other trustees in bringing the design to a resolution that satisfied Isozaki's expectations and the museum's needs.

Nicholas, Carl Hartnack, and William Kieschnick—along with Marcia Weisman, Betye Burton, Lenore Greenberg, and several other strong board members—effectively reset the museum's DNA. The battle over the building had effectively been a battle for the soul of the museum and its institutional priorities: respecting Isozaki would set the precedent for the way the museum would treat other artists. Course corrected, the museum could move forward.

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The focus of the fledgling institution pivoted to how to run a museum without a building, how to jump-start a program without a roof, and how to make the institution visible. There was no there there, not even a collection.

Even the director was largely absent. Hultén, a European whose heart was never in Los Angeles—or in the job—spent increasing amounts of time outside the country. The titular director had lent the start-up museum his prestige as a former head of the Pompidou, and Koshalek effectively ran the museum day-to-day. Koshalek was essentially inventing the new institution and turning it into both a presence in Los Angeles and a force among American museums. But Koshalek had not been trained at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum or at Williams College, both incubators of America's museum directors. His formation and training were atypical. If some people arrive saddled with "baggage," the thirty-eight-year-old University of Minnesota grad instead had suitcases stocked with useful ideas and strategies from his own personal experience and previous museum positions.

Koshalek studied architecture for his B.A. and art history for his M.A. He was professionally trained to design a

building from the ground up. Integral to that training was an architect's understanding that an institution's structure can define its image, and that its floor plan can shape its operation. Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim comes immediately to mind, but so does the "square Guggenheim," the Walker Art Center by Edward Larrabee Barnes, where Koshalek held his first museum position.

But beyond architectural training, Koshalek had been exposed to construction through his family. His father had been a project manager for an electrical contractor of large-scale ventures, and, long before his formal education, Koshalek *files* would accompany Koshalek père to building sites, and sometimes work on them. In the late 1950s in Glasgow, eastern Montana, for example, the son saw his father help transform an open prairie into a complete air force base within several years. Complex social ecosystems could grow out of a vacuum. Rather than seeing the project for its individual buildings, he saw them as taking a role in forming an entire community. Empty space could be a canvas.

Because of the CRA's offer, MOCA landed in downtown on prime real estate. For Koshalek the Grand Avenue location was not simply a prestige address for showcasing art. Unpacking his first suitcase, he saw a bigger picture, in which the museum would play a leading role in a larger territory of influence, the entire 4.7-square-mile area bounded by Los Angeles's major freeways—the 10, 101, 110, and the 5. He viewed downtown as the field for a larger ecosystem, in which the building and city could enter into a reciprocal relationship. He said, "We're going to build a program, we're going to orchestrate people, and the freeways will frame our exhibition space, which is the entirety of downtown Los Angeles." Thinking in terms of territory rather than square footage, Koshalek saw the museum as a catalyst in the city's larger cultural environment.

After the upheavals in the boardroom, Koshalek and his small but growing crew turned to the working details of their start-up. Some of the establishment members of the MOCA board might have had visions of grandeur when they signed on, but the initial charm and even the M.O. of the fledgling museum was its modesty. It grew in small, tactical increments. There wasn't the



TELLINGLY, MOCA DISCLAIMED ITS INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY AS A CULTURAL CORPORATION AND ADOPTED INSTEAD THE PERSONA OF AN ARTIST LOOKING FOR A STUDIO IN AN ALTERNATIVE AREA THAT OFFERED LOTS OF ROOM AND CHEAP RENT, WHERE IT COULD INVENT ITSELF WHILE MAINTAINING AN ARTIST'S POINT OF VIEW.

THESE WERE STRUCTURES WITH GREAT POTENTIAL: BIG, OPEN SPACES IN HIGH-CEILINGED, ROUGH-HEWN WAREHOUSES WITH EXPOSED BRICK, RAW CONCRETE, STEEL BEAMS, AND UNFINISHED WOOD CEILINGS, ALL IN THE SHADOW OF CITY HALL.

budget for much else—unlike with MoMA, there were no Rockefellers in sight.

Koshalek and Sherri Geldin, a young assistant fresh from graduate school, began operations in offices borrowed from a law firm. Within a year, it was clear the museum needed a space of its own, and, in 1982, the group set up its own office on Boyd, an obscure street in a transitional neighborhood between Skid Row and Little Tokyo. The grand-sounding Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art rented 5,000 square feet of space for \$4,000 a month on the second floor of a two-story building.

Tellingly, MOCA disclaimed its institutional identity as a cultural corporation and adopted instead the persona of an artist looking for a studio in an alternative area that offered lots of room and cheap rent, where it could invent itself while maintaining an artist's point of view. Offices were configured around a conference room with a table for twenty, and every morning the growing staff convened over coffee in unstructured, non-hierarchical get-togethers, like a writers' room, to jam ideas and discuss plans. There was no corner office; the layout did not diagram a power structure. Koshalek's impulse to delegate responsibility and share power was written in the floor plan.

For all Koshalek's apparent spontaneity, he was both tactical and strategic. Working with Marcy Goodwin, Koshalek mapped the institution's mission in what he called a "playbook" for the future. The long-range plan, submitted to the board, covered acquisition goals, exhibition schedule (including specific shows), and a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary scope—painting,



sculpture, photography, graphics, performance, concerts, films, architecture, and works in electronic media. Its geographical range would extend beyond the American-European axis to Asia, Australia, and South America, all the while keeping a focus on California artists. The board adopted the playbook in late 1981.

Even as Koshalek identified downtown between the freeways as his operational territory, he expanded his institutional territory internationally by choosing twenty-five museums with which he would partner and maintain relations over nearly twenty years. This global art network established MOCA's international reputation and helped with fundraising. A list-maker, Koshalek likewise identified twenty-five individuals and corporations in the larger art and foundation world that might—and did—help raise funds; they included Renault, the Ford Foundation, Gianni Agnelli, IBM, and Akira Mori (Japan's foremost developer).

Koshalek hired curators with whom he had already worked, principally at the Hudson River Museum. Julie Lazar continued working in development at P.S. 1 in Queens until a full-time position was created for her at MOCA, and she arrived in early 1981. Julia Brown came on board first as founding curator (later to be appointed senior curator) and immediately embarked on a schedule of regular studio visits to understand the local art scene, visits that would inform exhibitions, projects, and catalogues during her five years at MOCA. She and Koshalek saw the institution not as the center point in concentric rings of influence, but as a part of a larger field they would explore on art-and-artist-finding missions. Artists and their needs were foundational to the institution.



Several members of the Artists Advisory Council, a group that had helped guide the museum from its founding, were invited to sit on the board, an unusual deviation from standard museum practice.

It was after opening the Boyd Street office that Koshalek unpacked his second suitcase. During his time at the Walker Art Center, that museum had faced a two-year gap as its original building was demolished and replaced by an Edward Larrabee Barnes design. Museum director Martin Friedman charged Koshalek (and performing-arts director Suzanne Weil) with the task of finding venues for what we would now call “pop-up” shows. For *The Museum Without Walls*, as it was called, Friedman’s directive to Koshalek was, “Let’s play in the whole community.”

Now Koshalek found himself in a parallel situation, officiating over a museum that was waiting for its building. In his playbook, Koshalek had proposed the Guerrilla Museum, an informal agenda for what he called “art attacks” that would occur as the museum started up programming. The plan was for artists to “perform” site-specific installations in abandoned buildings, warehouses, bridges, streets, and vacant lots, and then disappear. In this museum without walls, Koshalek, curators, and artists would look to found spaces—like Duchamp’s readymades—as venues for pop-up events or installations.

By early 1982 it was clear that the Isozaki building would not be completed by the hoped-for date, to coincide with the 1984 Olympics. The staff felt the need for what it called a “Transitional Museum,” and they started looking for a dedicated interim space that would allow sustained efforts and long-range plans beyond episodic guerrilla-art raids. The young museum was preparing like a chrysalis to molt into a more mature phase of its development.

In 1982, the ever-helpful CRA came through with another opportunity. Because its administrative jurisdiction lay roughly within the same freeway boundaries that Koshalek had identified as museum territory, the CRA’s interests in redeveloping downtown overlapped with MOCA’s. The CRA asked Geldin to look at a cluster of seven neighboring unused warehouses on Central

Avenue—a whole block of abandoned buildings in Little Tokyo, all owned by the city. These were structures with great potential: big, open spaces in high-ceilinged, rough-hewn warehouses with exposed brick, raw concrete, steel beams, and unfinished wood ceilings, all in the shadow of City Hall.

Everyone on the MOCA staff saw the promise of these buildings. Koshalek now unpacked his third suitcase. Architects characteristically expand a project to its most complete potential, and his training predisposed him to take this one to its logical limits. He immediately imagined the seven buildings as a city within a city—complete with a museum, artist lofts, and performing-arts venues that would catalyze the redevelopment of an area currently overpopulated with parking lots.

Seismic codes, however, interceded, limiting Koshalek’s urbanizing vision. Most of the buildings required upgrades at a scale that made their adaptive reuse unfeasible. But two of the buildings, known as Building 4 and Building 5—one of them a former police garage in which Mayor Bradley, as a policeman, had had his squad car repaired—could remain. And, even if they were not up to code, the rest of the Central Avenue warehouses opened up possibilities for the guerrilla project, which had been discussed but still not actualized. MOCA seized the opportunity.

In 1982, Julia Brown commissioned Maria Nordman to inaugurate a series of guerrilla happenings, without officially using the term. An artist whose installations were staged events, like sets and scenes from a movie, Nordman took over a building in Little Tokyo on Central Avenue for a day. In a piece called *Yang-na*, named for an area occupied by the Southland’s indigenous Tongva, she flooded the space, creating a refractory environment in which light bounced off water, casting wall and ceiling mirages as visitors either waded through the shallow pool, or sat on colored chairs set on the wooden floor in the pool. Nordman disallowed photography and press coverage. The ephemeral nature of the undocumented event heightened the singularity and intensity of a piece that only existed in the moment.

FOR FRENCH WRITER AND THEORIST GEORGES BATAILLE, THESE KINDS OF BUILDINGS AND PLACES ESCHEWED INSTITUTIONAL FORMALITY AND POWER AND LENT THEMSELVES TO ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION.





THE SEVERAL GUERRILLA INSTALLATIONS ELEVATED THE PROFILE OF THE MUSEUM AND BEGAN THE BUILD-UP OF AN AUDIENCE, AT THE SAME TIME STARTING A TRANSFORMATION OF THE PERCEPTION OF DOWNTOWN FROM A DRIVE-BY CENTER INTO A CULTURAL VECTOR.



Mark Lere: *Halo/Wheel*, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Opposite the location of Nordman's installation, James Turrell removed the ceiling of an abandoned gas station that was polygonal in shape, creating one of his early sky pieces. Viewers sat in a room that isolated the sky and positioned viewers to see it as the canvas. In an echo of Baroque and Rococo skies painted on the ceilings of churches and palaces, pure sky and light minus the ceiling were the revelation.

In the same disused building, Los Angeles artist Betye Saar created an exhibition in two parts, both curated by Brown. In the shows, Saar constructed small assemblages in boxes and arrayed them as an assemblage within the larger box, the old gas station. (Brown later commissioned Maria Nordman to do another installation in the gas-station building.)

There was a tactical aspect to the installations in which artists occupied disused buildings like hermit crabs moving into empty shells. Rescue buildings and urban spaces were integral to the program, or at least to the idea of the program: the buildings that were accessible, those that interested the artists, were the discards that would never make it onto a postcard or into a history book. For French writer and theorist Georges Bataille, these kinds of buildings and places eschewed institutional formality and power and lent themselves to artistic interpretation. The several guerrilla installations elevated the profile of the museum and began the build-up of an audience, at the same time starting a transformation of the perception of downtown from a drive-by center into a cultural vector.

These events were not part of a grand scheme. A strategic but largely intuitive thinker driven by cultivated enthusiasms, Koshalek was not running a theory shop. Happenings occurred outside museum walls and effectively outside any mainstream church of thought: they were innocent of art theology and effectively pagan, the result of spontaneous-combustion opportunities in Koshalek's energy field. And, though the early MOCA shows received press coverage, at the time the city still lacked major critics writing in prominent publications. Los Angeles had no Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, or Rosalind Krauss to put these events in a larger perspective. The academic-theory industry that

would take over the museum and university world later in the decade had not yet happened, at least not in Los Angeles. What was an eventful, meaningful, and original period in the city's cultural life passed under the radar of the academic establishment, untheorized. MOCA was on its own, in the trenches, testing ideas, listening to living artists, inventing ways to engage audiences.

No one, for example, acknowledged the affinity between MOCA's several guerrilla ambushes and the events that Situationists had provoked in Paris during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In what they called "derives" ("drifts" or "drifting"), Situationists organized urban happenings that cast the city and its institutions in a new light, disrupting habitual ways of seeing it. They improvised wayward tours, calling out little-known facts and histories as citizens drifted on urban safaris through neighborhoods, and they staged urban provocations. One Easter Sunday, Situationist scoundrels locked priests in the vestry of Notre Dame, donned clerical vestments, and proceeded in a procession swinging incense to the altar, where they proclaimed the death of God (they were run out of the church).

MOCA's guerrilleros performed installations rather than events, acts of art rather than urban provocations. MOCA's installations and related performances, however, shared an anti-consumerist position with the Situationists. Neither the French provocateurs nor the California artists produced commodities that could be sold and so performed implicit critiques of the art market, the gallery system, and the consumer society (a critique actively pursued in New York as well). But L.A.'s thin critical establishment never interpreted MOCA's happenings in a larger intellectual construct. The encounters downtown remained anecdotal, episodic, and independent, too ephemeral and unanalyzed to point to a movement greater than a portfolio of work.

In the late 1970s, Rosalind Krauss wrote her seminal essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," which dealt with artists who largely worked outside galleries, sometimes in mountains and deserts—Mary Miss, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Donald Judd, Michael Heizer—undomesticated and uncommercialized by museums, galleries, and the art market. Gordon Matta-Clark had, in a short but blazing



PERHAPS OUT OF HIS OUTSIDER'S AFFINITY WITH THE CITY'S OVERLOOKED LANDSCAPE, GEHRY HAD ALWAYS HAD AN INTEREST IN THE UNNOTICED CITYSCAPE,

MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES THAT WERE SO COMMON THAT, AS ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN ESTHER MCCOY SAID, THE EYE REFUSED TO SEE THEM.

decade of work during the 1970s, operated on existing buildings and developed the idea of anarchitecture, operating in the gaps and voids, working with architectural leftovers.

MOCA enacted a version of Krauss's expanded field, and like Matta-Clark, worked in an urban territory. This period was gestational for MOCA, instrumental in setting the attitude and temperament of the museum and forging its direction as a risk-taking operation. The initial programs in Buildings 4 and 5 effectively laid a subconscious base for what would become the adult MOCA. The nimble museum established roots as a scrappy street museum rather than as a High Culture creature of the boulevards.

MOCA's Boyd Street offices had a casualness that was inclusionary. Operating in an off-the-grid location meant operating outside conventional expectations. Koshalek opened the often-closed system of museum operation with infusions of energy, ideas, people, and, above all, risk (in thermodynamics, closed systems die). MOCA's roster of new talent included more women than usually figured in the lineup coming out of the dugout of the male-dominated New York art world. A young museum staffed largely by women established from the outset a record of shows by promising and accomplished female artists, a pattern that would continue through the rest of Koshalek's tenure. Gender equality was on the agenda.

Still, conservative forces lingered at the trustee level among people who had an institutional image of high culture. Even as the city was ready to enter a friendly deal with MOCA for the use of the Central Avenue buildings, Eli Broad—head of the Finance Committee, and in control

of MOCA's purse strings—demurred. He felt a temporary museum would compete with fundraising for the museum on Bunker Hill. However, trustee and *L.A. Times* CEO Franklin Murphy took up the cause of a building he saw as “a Rauschenberg combine.” In one of Koshalek's workarounds, the director funded the warehouse remodeling by publishing an artist portfolio, *Eight by Eight*, which MOCA sold for \$10,000 each, a sum augmented by a \$500,000 ARCO loan (offered by Kieschnick) that was later forgiven. The city leased the 60,000-square-foot warehouses for a dollar a year during an initial five-year period (subsequently extended to ninety-nine years). MOCA got its second building free.

As with its move to Boyd Street, MOCA from the outset conceived the warehouses as the kind of space an artist would choose as a studio (since the 1970s, artists had colonized lofts, impacting the scale of canvases, which needed suitably tall, deep spaces for viewing). The buildings would not be a jewel box for art, but a kind of working studio that could nourish, incite, and sustain MOCA's anti-institutional imagination.

Any museum of modern or contemporary art in America inevitably looked over its shoulder at the ongoing precedent Alfred Barr had set at MoMA in the 1930s. However, MOCA's move into an ex-police-car garage broke the MoMA model of the white-box museum in the middle of prime real estate. In a declaration of independence, as though seceding from the union of contemporary American museums, MOCA elected not to see itself through New York eyes: its roots would be indigenous not endogenous. As Julia Brown said, “MOCA doesn't need to follow MoMA at all; it can have its own goals, be

its own gold standard, and take influences from all kinds of different places, and then create something new, which is what we did.”

In the United States there was no precedent for the kind of museum building that MOCA was proposing. Los Angeles was fertile ground for a warehouse museum because Angelenos, accustomed to one-story bow-truss buildings as common as the grocery store on the corner, understood the kind of expansive volume the building type offered. MOCA, then, came out of a California rather than New York sense of space. Frank Gehry of course understood the potential of the voluminous warehouse. “No matter what museum you build, you've got to have this big space, this major space,” he said.

Size and height mattered, but so did the rawness of the materials, and their tactility: brick, redwood ceilings, exposed steel, raw concrete. The size, materiality, and informality of the contiguous Buildings 4 and 5 would invite artists to test ideas at a large scale. The space invited the imagination to expand.

But who would be the architect for a building that was so good it didn't need an architect?

Still acting as deputy director before Hultén's return to France in 1983, Koshalek was driving the project, and he had only one architect in mind: “I saw Frank Gehry suffer in the meetings for the Bunker Hill building, and I felt that the committee had demeaned this extraordinary architect.”

Like Koshalek, Gehry, too, had suitcases. In 1979 Gehry had designed his Santa Monica home as a Rauschenberg

combine of common street materials such as corrugated metal, chain-link fencing, wired glass, and raw lumber. And, coincidentally, he had also just completed photographic documentation of old factory buildings in Los Angeles. Industrial buildings in a bypassed part of town were terra incognita for establishment architects geared to Wilshire Boulevard's corporate architectural agenda. Perhaps out of his outsider's affinity with the city's overlooked landscape, Gehry had always had an interest in the unnoticed cityscape, materials and structures that were so common that, as architectural historian Esther McCoy said, the eye refused to see them. Gehry saw them with the eyes of the artists who used such rejected materials in their fresh inventions.

When Koshalek contacted Gehry about adapting the warehouses into a gallery, the architect remained non-committal: given his treatment by the Architecture Committee, he was suspicious of the museum's intentions, and his pride made him resist the idea of what must have seemed like a consolation prize. Koshalek pressed his case with convincing earnestness.

A day later, the architect received a call from Coy Howard. As Gehry remembered it, Howard asked, “‘Have you been asked to do the temporary building?’ And I said, ‘Why do you ask?’ He said, ‘Well, it's my building; I should be doing it.’ I said, ‘Did you tell them that?’ And there was silence. I said, ‘Well, why don't you go tell them that.’ And I hung up. (laughs).”

Perhaps gun shy from the Bunker Hill controversy, the board did not resist Koshalek's pick. Besides, a garage on an obscure street on the lee side of Bunker Hill, an







interim space, hardly registered on the official radar. No one could anticipate that board approval would lead to a major architectural accomplishment that cast MOCA as an international champion of the cutting edge. The board quickly approved moving forward with Frank Gehry.

Before she came to Los Angeles to work as a curator for the museum, Julie Lazar had sent Koshalek two program proposals, *The Stages of Performance* and *The Territory of Art*. She proposed *Stages of Performance* as an interdisciplinary project fusing architecture and performance art. Inviting artists to use abandoned buildings as a canvas dovetailed with MOCA's ongoing work of site-specific art pieces in found spaces, though Lazar, with a background in the performing arts, shifted the emphasis to live events rather than installations.

America's younger critics and artists were then assaulting the strict separation of the arts once militated by New York critic Clement Greenberg, and Lazar was a vocal and active advocate of a new inter-media program. As a part of sweeping changes in the art world, sculpture and painting were coming off the pedestal and outside the frame and into spaces outside the gallery.

The only proposal of Lazar's *Stages of Performance* that would finally come to fruition was the collaboration between Lucinda Childs, Frank Gehry, and the San Francisco-based composer John Adams that took place in Building 5, on which Gehry was already working. The performance, *Available Light*, was a signal event inaugurating what was now called The Temporary Contemporary as well as MOCA itself, a declaration that the museum was open for business at a location with a street address. The show demonstrated how architecture played an active role in shaping the programs and identity of the museum.

The stage that Gehry constructed for Childs's troupe was a platform made from 2-by-4s and plywood straight from the lumberyard, unpainted. Gehry also designed an elevated stage that stepped up in back to another level. He was building a framed structure within the framework of another framed structure, a construction site within the larger construction site. Quoting from

L.A.'s streetscape, and from the work of his artist friends, he hung curtains of chain link at the back of the stage, effectively blocking the eyes of the audience from the cavernous space beyond. The continuity between the existing shell of the warehouse and Gehry's installation was seamless. The lumber and chain link would be recycled after the performance into the ongoing construction of the building itself.

Gehry is a tactile architect, a materialist who works with the properties of known or new materials to invent and shape his buildings. But among the suitcases that Gehry unpacked at MOCA was one filled with influences from California's Light and Space artists—Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, and Peter Alexander, among others—who worked with shadow, reflections, and raw light. Gehry, in fact, often used materials to trigger fugitive immaterial effects. For *Available Light*, he covered the clerestory windows with red theatrical gel so that at dusk, as the show started, the setting sun projected through the tint, changing the mood of the space, warming its visual temperature.

In September 1983, in sold-out performances over five nights, audiences packed onto rented bleachers watched a group of eleven dancers move in and out of points on a choreographic grid to minimalist music on Gehry's minimalist stage. A consistent tonal restraint permeated the three disciplines, dance, music, and architecture.

*Available Light* was both a synopsis and embodiment of the then avant-garde—it was performance art executed to an exquisitely calibrated monotone, like a Zen om chanted in an open, nondirectional field of space. It was a Postmodernist interdisciplinary *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the perfect inaugural event signaling MOCA's coming program of adventuresome, original, ready-to-fail-if-necessary contemporary programing. It was not a known work safely recycled from the known Modernist repertoire.

Architecture was the vehicle for that moment in September. The big, shaggy, unpolished warehouse set expectations for the museum. Gehry's subdued, almost deadpan space was an appropriate

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understatement that, in its subtle way, subverted the class-bound connotations of museums usually designed in architectural black tie.

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Doris Saatchi, the collector who, with her husband Charles, would later open the Saatchi Gallery in an old paint warehouse in London, wrote me: “When I asked Frank what the brief had been, he said, ‘My brief to myself was that I had been given a great space to work with and my job was not to screw it up. So I did as little as possible.’”

Gehry had always admired the raw energy of buildings under construction before the walls are closed up with stucco and Sheetrock, before finishes varnished the life out of them. He saw that his job here was to enhance and sustain the energy of the raw materials, and so he disciplined himself to not exercise the discipline in which he was trained. In fact, he had little budget to do much more. He didn’t worry the building by overdesigning, but confined his work to subtle adjustments. He produced little documentation and left most of the site work to his associate, Bob Hale.

The quality of the finished building was not a fortuitous accident. Originally designed as a major hardware store by A.C. Martin, one of the architects of City Hall, Building 5 had a distinguished pedigree. Geldin recalled that Gehry “kind of liked it the way it was. Most of the project’s cost had to do with digging trenches to make it earthquake safe, and then to tie the walls to the steel.”

Gehry basically gave the former garage a tune-up, sand-blasting the redwood ceiling and up-lighting it so the cavernous space seemed even taller. Perimeter rooms that Gehry called “chapels” serviced the main space, which he scrupulously left intact. He created a propyleum of ramps out of the loading dock for handicapped access. The propyleum served as a palate cleanser, a territory inside the building distinct from the outside, a perceptual threshold.

To the museum’s credit, no one meddled. Hultén, still director, left Koshalek to husband the project. Artists understood the project’s appeal. Barbara Kruger called

the renovation “the most accommodating and challenging and really joyous space for an artist to work in. The problem with so many museums, and so much architecture today, is that they’re overdetermined and overdesigned.”

The unfinished, open-ended, participatory quality suited the unconventional direction in which Koshalek—deceptively camouflaged like a banker in a gray suit and white shirt—was leading the museum. A different kind of space allowed a different kind of art, which MOCA, through its building, elicited.

Immediately after *The First Show: Painting and Sculpture from Eight Collections, 1940–1980*, Julia Brown put The TC through its paces with *In Context*, a series of one-person exhibitions by contemporary artists. Most tested the building’s potential, and the highly mutable space transformed easily. Resilient and influential, it could absorb body blows and suggest, by its scale alone, directions that artists might take. Brown remembers, “The size and character of the building offered the opportunity to do works that were ambitious and expansive, and the drama of the space allowed presentations that were themselves theatrical.” Brown’s shows established a program of highly independent, daring, thoughtful, and challenging exhibitions that would last through the millennium. As a kind of ally to artists, the building helped Brown set a precedent for the unexpected.

In his 1984 show, *Michael Heizer: 45°, 90°, 180°/ Geometric Extraction*, the artist used the building as a studio in which he fabricated a form of land sculpture inside its vastness. Heizer and his construction crew effectively staged an in-process exhibit as they framed monolithic wedge-shaped geometric forms that they surfaced in a specially fabricated cardboard and then painted in mottled black-and-white patterns. The sculpture brought to The TC a sense of geometric mass as old as the pyramids, which Heizer had been constructing in his earthworks in the desert since the 1960s. For The TC Heizer created an immersive environment through which visitors walked, reduced to a state of wonder by the monumentality of a pharaonic landscape that could also be viewed from the loading dock and the roof of the bunker.

**THE UNFINISHED, OPEN-ENDED, PARTICIPATORY QUALITY SUITED THE UNCONVENTIONAL DIRECTION IN WHICH KOSHALEK—DECEPTIVELY CAMOUFLAGED LIKE A BANKER IN A GRAY SUIT AND WHITE SHIRT—WAS LEADING THE MUSEUM. A DIFFERENT KIND OF SPACE ALLOWED A DIFFERENT KIND OF ART, WHICH MOCA, THROUGH ITS BUILDING, ELICITED.**







Richard Serra, *Call Me Ishmael*, 1986, *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, 1986, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

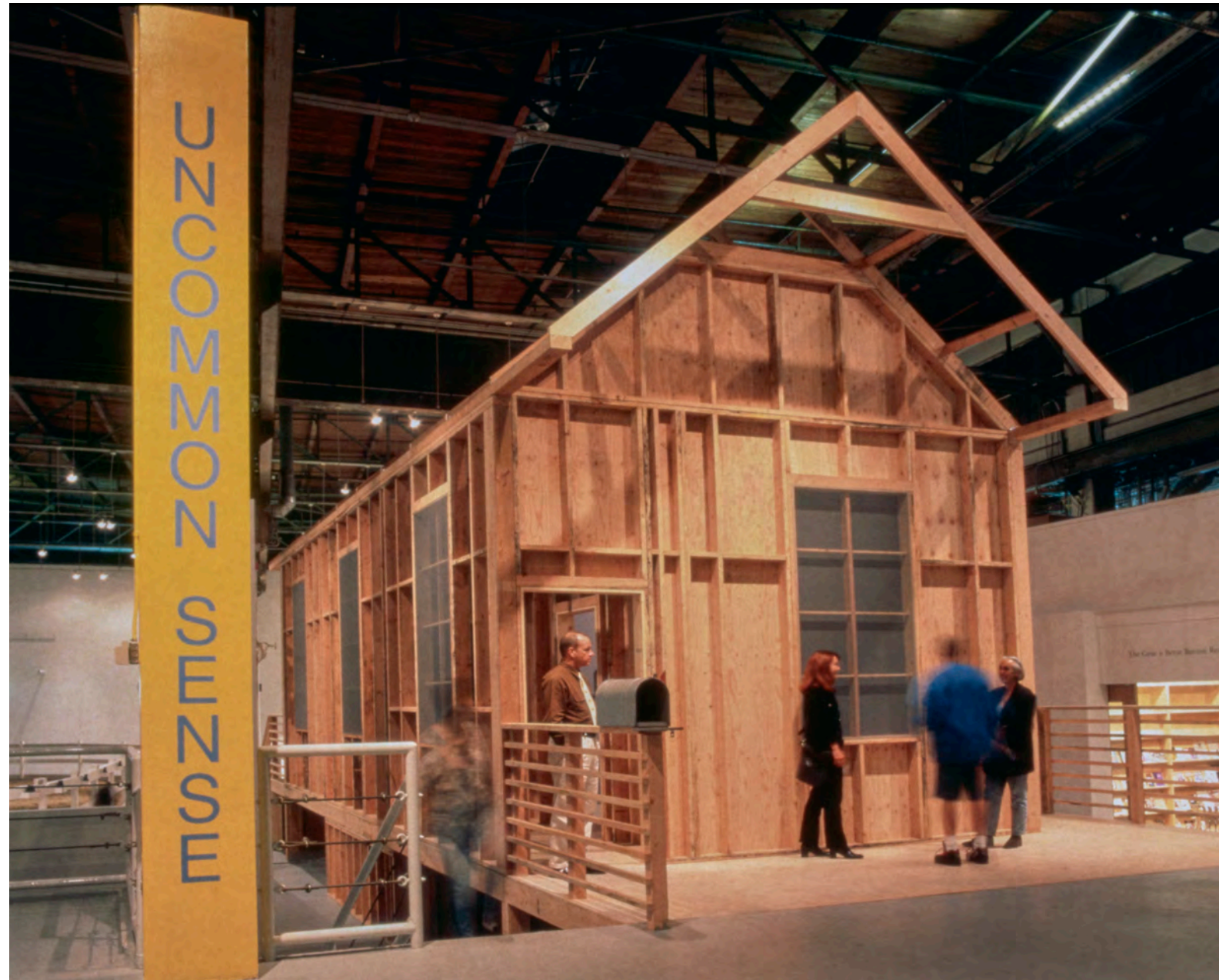
FOR THE TC HEIZER CREATED AN IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH WHICH VISITORS WALKED, REDUCED TO A STATE OF WONDER BY THE MONUMENTALITY OF A PHARAONIC LANDSCAPE THAT COULD ALSO BE VIEWED FROM THE LOADING DOCK AND THE ROOF OF THE BUNKER.



Michael Heizer: *45°, 90°, 180°/Geometric Extraction*, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



IN 1995, FOR THE REOPENING OF THE TC AFTER A THREE-YEAR HIATUS, MOCA COMMISSIONED SIX ARTISTS AND ONE ARTIST COLLABORATIVE TO CREATE WORKS FOR *UNCOMMON SENSE*, A SERIES OF SHOWS INTENDED TO ENGAGE AUDIENCES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM'S WALLS.



Rick Lowe, in *Uncommon Sense*, 1997, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

*Halo/Wheel* was a two-part show in Brown's *In Context* series that took place inside and outside The TC. In one part, *Mark Lere: New and Selected Work*, the Los Angeles-based artist used The TC as a studio, drawing on walls and manipulating the space. He displayed commissioned handmade pieces, most with rough, quasi-geometric shapes that evoked images of architecture, the body, and nature. In the conjugal show outside The TC, he expanded the museum into the field, dispersing sculptural fragments throughout Los Angeles. Starting from L.A.'s original Pueblo (the city's core, established in 1781 by Governor Felipe de Neve) and radiating out in a centrifugal pattern, visitors could find enigmatic fragments scattered on lawns or embedded in the sides of roads, in five street locations, six park sites, and an area of the Los Angeles River. In what was a participatory exercise of visual memory and imagination, visitors pieced together the show in their minds. The motion and mobility of a car-oriented city factored into the experience of the piece. Cars required.

Perhaps The TC's most muscular show was *Richard Serra Sculptures*. The New York sculptor famously sites monumental pieces to play against and within host structures. Here, in his 1998–99 show, he erected the first of his *Torqued Ellipses*. Exterior walls had to be cut open in order to bring his huge steel pieces into the space, an operation the forgiving fabric of the building handily tolerated. Serra's leaning corten walls were not objects but instead curved spaces through which visitors walked. The areas between the ellipses and Gehry's walls were not residual, but positive constructs. The TC's volume allowed the massive pieces room to breathe. Serra said that working in Building 5 was like working outside.

Having already worked together on other projects, Serra and Gehry completed this virtual collaboration in a consecutive sequence, Gehry having established the space before Serra responded. Serra had also used Gehry's computer, with its CATIA aerospace program, to actually torque the steel plates, so their collaboration was technological as well.

In 1995, for the reopening of The TC after a three-year hiatus, MOCA commissioned six artists and one artist collaborative to create works for *Uncommon Sense*, a series

of shows intended to engage audiences inside and outside the museum's walls. Co-curated by Julie Lazar and Tom Finkelpearl, the premise of the free-range show invited performance and installation artists to engage diverse audiences outside the museum and/or within The TC. Lazar could draw on her previous experience with works by Elizabeth Streb and by Betye Saar and Ellen Sebastian.

In 1990 Los Angeles artist Betye Saar had collaborated with theater director Ellen Sebastian on an installation and performance piece about the legendary Black author, anthropologist, and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston. Inside the rooms of The TC's concrete-block bunker, Saar created an intimate installation, *Sanctified Visions*, about Hurston's life, and designed in an adjacent space the set for *Sanctified*, a play that featured the gospel choir from Los Angeles's First AME Church. During its run of ten performances, The TC offered a combination of a tranquil space and high ceilings on a big stage for big music and sound.

For *ACTION OCCUPATION* (1995), extreme-action artist Elizabeth Streb had choreographed aerialist dancers who performed in nine specially lit installations, set-ups that included trampolines, custom-built wooden walls, and existing steel rafters for space diving, air bouncing, or floating in space. During the day, performers taught acrobatics to students gratis. At night, accessibly priced performances held audiences in rapt attention.

Among the works in *Uncommon Sense* was *Unburning Freedom Hall*, a consciousness-raising event that New York-based Mierle Laderman Ukeles conceived to “undo” the 1838 burning of Pennsylvania Hall by anti-abolitionists. In a series of “walks” Ukeles held with community groups and schools, she staged “unburning” programs that included trips to fire stations and sanitation yards to visit the people who had helped hold together South Central during the Watts riots. Inside The TC, Ukeles constructed building-wide installations that resembled Saharan landscapes formed by tons of recycled glass, a reference to the window-smashing leading up to the 1838 burning. The story of Freedom Hall was shown on the monitor at the entry to her glass landscape. Ukeles also conducted “peace” talks around a cobalt-blue glass table





Elizabeth Streb, *ACTION OCCUPATION*, 1995, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

INSIDE THE ROOMS OF THE TC'S CONCRETE-BLOCK BUNKER, SAAR CREATED AN INTIMATE INSTALLATION, *SANCTIFIED VISIONS*, ABOUT HURSTON'S LIFE, AND DESIGNED IN AN ADJACENT SPACE THE SET FOR *SANCTIFIED*, A PLAY THAT FEATURED THE GOSPEL CHOIR FROM LOS ANGELES'S FIRST AME CHURCH.



Esther Scott (seated) and Shakiri (dancing) in Ellen Sebastian, *Sanctified*, 1990, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



set among the mounds. “Unburning” objects made by the community were displayed.

For *Uncommon Sense*, the Los Angeles-based, activist Cornerstone Theater organized *bUS pLAys*, a theatrical performance inside buses developed by artists and non-artists in seven L.A. neighborhoods. The buses were parked inside The TC, where a rainbow of professional and amateur actors performed before audiences seated within the vehicles. Surrounding murals depicted city scenes, as though the buses were driving through the city’s streets.

In *West*, also part of *Uncommon Sense*, Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom built a corral for barrel racing on horseback, as in a rodeo, in a demonstration of a sport in which women weren’t originally allowed to compete. Binoculars showed videos of other kinds of activities in various countries in which women were excluded from participation. When Koshalek brought MoMA trustee David Rockefeller to the show, he was not amused: horses just didn’t belong in a museum. Risk-taking MOCA was the antithesis of the more conservative MoMA.

MOCA, an expanded museum operating in an expanded field, widened the possibilities beyond what could be imagined inside more contained and polished spaces. A museum program occurring outside the walls opened its demographic range to involve a larger community in art production and shows. The building itself added square footage and cubic volume to the spatial equation, expanding art’s usual scale, expanding even the concept of what was considered art. Size and informality influenced programming.

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The second program that Lazar had originally proposed for MOCA, *The Territory of Art*, extended the museum’s thrust outside its walls and into radio. When Lazar was still in New York Koshalek had telephoned her while he was driving on a freeway, commenting that he was spending a lot of time in the car listening to the radio. “We need to communicate what we’re going to do to a large audience,” he said. In response Lazar launched *The Territory of Art* in April 1984 and continued the series for a decade, producing about fifty half-hour segments.

MOCA commissioned performers, actors, and cultural figures such as Peter Sellars, Elizabeth Streb, Frank Zappa, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Ruth Maleczek to participate in programs broadcast over 116 stations throughout the United States, to theme music composed for the show.

Anticipating The TC’s second show, Pontus Hultén and Walter Hopps’s *The Automobile and Culture*, as well as the Olympic Arts Festival, the Mark Taper Forum approached MOCA about a collaboration between the two institutions. Koshalek proposed live performances during which actors would climb into cars and buses or perform in restaurants and on loading docks for an audience of thousands, or one. This became a three-day performance festival called *Carplays*, an examination of the car in everyday life.

To open the festival, an art-car/low-rider parade started at the Music Center plaza and continued down First Street, concluding in front of The Temporary Contemporary on Central Avenue. There, in the rear loading dock of The TC, Bill Talen acted on a set designed by Craig Hodgetts. In other venues, Spaulding Gray performed a one-man piece, *Interviewing the Audience*, while walking among the tables of a downtown restaurant. Michael Bishop and David Best (now famous for his wooden temples that appear at Burning Man) created an art car outside The TC called “Rhinomobile,” working with the local community over three days (the car is now in the di Rosa Center in Napa). Interdisciplinary performance artist Rachel Rosenthal wrote a text drawn from race-car magazines and from the Kabbala, and performed it to music composed by sound artist Dark Bob. She choreographed a vehicular dance, *KabbaLAMobile*, which she directed from a scaffold, dressed as a samurai warrior, as race-car drivers performed configurations on the parking lot of the Department of Water and Power under her direction. The geysers of the DWP’s water garden danced in the background.

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MOCA had worked for the right to occupy a found object, and its success established The Temporary Contemporary as an alternative to MoMA’s white-box paradigm. Integral to its success was its precedent to

take the side of the artist, especially interdisciplinary artists doing installations and performances. Very few, if any, institutions before 1980 in this country occupied and transformed warehouse buildings. Even the most progressive designs, such as Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim, Edward Larrabee Barnes’s Walker, and Isozaki’s own project on Grand Avenue, expressed the ethos of the formal expectations and lifestyles that generally reigned in cities before loft culture across the country changed the way Americans saw space in residences, galleries, restaurants, and stores. By the 1980s, the museum world was already confronting art of a scale much larger than the space permitted in living rooms. Michael Heizer, Dan Flavin, and Robert Rauschenberg, among many others, produced large works, some huge, art that was bigger than objects, and other than European palaces, the domestic scale of most museums didn’t offer the ceiling heights or the distancing space requisite for seeing the works. Showing outsize work that was establishing new parameters in art was important but impossible in many museums, and building informality at large scale was institutionally difficult because of the temperament reigning in most museums, which leaned toward elegant propriety, not edge.

Predisposed to informality, MOCA was in some way institutionally liberated: it had cast itself as the anti-institution. The Temporary Contemporary embodied the ethos of changed times, the scale of the art, and the museum’s own expansive character. The museum embodied a warmer universe. Instead of the clinical objectivity of MoMA’s white-box environment, where objects floated in an indifferent Newtonian space, The TC bridged the gap between object and subject by offering a more tactile, atmospheric, and psychologically comfortable experience. Gehry was basically a humanist.

Though David Rockefeller objected to horses in a museum, others who visited—including Tom Krens, Nick Serota, and Doris and Charles Saatchi—left impressed and influenced as they formed, respectively, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in an abandoned North Adams factory; the Tate Modern in the Bankside Power Station in London; and the Saatchi Gallery in an old paint factory on Boundary Road in London. Krens made overtures to Gehry to design the

Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and Serota invited Koshalek onto the jury to choose the architect for the Tate Modern. Doris Saatchi told me, “The main and true influences as to where we wanted to show our growing art collection were the converted factories and disused warehouses where galleries were showing the art we liked down in New York City’s SoHo, and also our awareness [about accommodating] the art we loved—Richard Serra, Julian Schnabel, Donald Judd. But it’s fair to say that having seen and been impressed with what Frank did with The TC space, we knew Max [Gordon] would give us something similar.”

Many factors came together in the formation of these museums, but together they formed a new taxonomy within the species.

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Architecture and urbanism design shows entered MOCA’s calendar of events early on. Within three years of The TC’s opening, the museum mounted the first of what would be, through the rest of Koshalek’s tenure as director, a regular and ambitious program of architecture and planning shows.

But no one knew this would be the case in 1980. Not long after the Isozaki wars, a group of Los Angeles architects and designers banded together to form the Architecture and Design Support Group for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (I was its first chairman). With the Architecture and Design Department at MoMA as an institutional precedent, our goal was to encourage the museum to treat architecture and design as a regular and integral part of its curriculum. The position was not obvious or ubiquitously shared. My colleague at the *Herald*, art critic Christopher Knight, wrote that the support group effectively constituted a lobby pressing for its own interests (ignoring that the precedent for artist participation in what has been called an “artist-founded museum” was already set by the Artists Advisory Council early on).

What the support group didn’t realize was that we were pushing on an open door. By training, experience, and attitude, Koshalek was predisposed to include architecture; it was in his 1981 playbook, mapping the museum’s mission, which emphasized multidisciplinarity. Over the



IN ADDITION TO THE TWO FULL-SCALE REPLICAS, BUILT BY HOLLYWOOD STAGE-SET CREWS, THE SHOW INCLUDED SCALE MODELS OF ALL THE CASE STUDY HOUSES.

course of the next fifteen years, MOCA would stage ten architecture and urban-planning shows. It featured and celebrated MOCA's own architects, Gehry and Isozaki, in separate shows, *The Architecture of Frank Gehry* and *Arata Isozaki 1960/1990 Architecture*. Isozaki also figured in another such show, a 1986 exhibition about contemporary architecture in Japan, *Tokyo: Form and Spirit*. In 1992, MOCA organized *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, an exhibition Koshalek had suggested in his playbook. Isozaki, by now an esteemed MOCA collaborator, designed the installation, which opened at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and traveled to the Pompidou Center, MoMA, the Kimbell in Fort Worth, and finally to Japan.

Before he left MOCA in 1999, Koshalek authorized Elizabeth Smith's show on R.M. Schindler. The exhibition finally gave Los Angeles's greatest Modernist the exhibition that MoMA had denied him for decades: it was a necessary historical corrective.

Ambitious in scope, the exhibitions took up most, or all, of The TC and the Bunker Hill galleries. *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses* in The Temporary Contemporary (1989), was one of the museum's most popular shows because of its resonance in Los Angeles. Initiated by Koshalek and curated by Smith, the show acknowledged the city's leading role in the mid-century modern phase of the Modernist movement, which had rooted in Los Angeles in the 1920s (with Schindler, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Richard Neutra). The spaciousness of The TC allowed designers Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung to build two full-scale houses from the program: a replica of Case Study House #4 by Ralph Rapson, the Greenbelt

House (1945), and Pierre Koenig's famous Case Study House #22, the Stahl House (1959), situated on the roof of the one-story bunker inside the building. The architects had re-created the house's hillside position overlooking the Los Angeles basin from the Hollywood Hills. Koshalek enlisted the redoubtable Esther McCoy, who had worked for Schindler and had written many articles for *Arts & Architecture* (the sponsor of the Case Study House program), to consult on the show. She advised Koshalek to make it "important."

MOCA did. In addition to the two full-scale replicas, built by Hollywood stage-set crews, the show included scale models of all the Case Study houses. Sprawled through Building 5, the show was well received by both the public and critics and greatly valued in the local architecture community, whose cultural contribution to Los Angeles had never been identified institutionally so generously and thoughtfully. MOCA was acknowledging what Marcy Goodwin called L.A.'s architecture culture.

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By the time the Isozaki building opened in 1986, The Temporary Contemporary had been a running success for two years and was no longer really temporary. It had established itself as a valuable asset and instrument of the MOCA program, effectively becoming The Permanent Temporary.

In 1986, MOCA found itself in the enviable position of being bipolar, having two buildings across downtown with a total of 160,000 square feet between them. The museum owned them free and clear.





The design of the two buildings could hardly be more different, and another strength of the institution was that some artists and some shows were better suited to one than to the other. Richard Serra, Jonathan Borofsky, and Michael Heizer preferred the capacious informality of The Temporary Contemporary. Anselm Kiefer, Ellsworth Kelly, Cy Twombly, and Bruce Nauman preferred the Isozaki building, precisely because of its abstraction and quietude. With planar walls, voluminous galleries, and light falling softly and evenly from skylights, Isozaki had created Zen spaces with the stillness of contemplative Japanese gardens. Gehry's galleries were physical and tactile; Isozaki's were ethereal. The two sets of galleries represented different forms of space and beauty.

When Isozaki first came to L.A., he found himself designing a building within a hostile urban context, a site overwhelmed by skyscrapers of chilling uniformity, and public spaces that, despite good intentions, failed to create a vibrant urban life. Office workers, most of whom arrived by car, parked in basements, rode to work in elevators, descended to lunch in elevators, and left in cars, bypassing the city outside most of the time.

In 1926, Bertram Goodhue designed the Los Angeles Central Library on Fifth Street as a solid, stepped

concrete tower topped by a tiled pyramid with images of a blazing sun. The distinguished monument, which anchored downtown, had been saved after a preservation battle that took place shortly before Isozaki arrived in L.A. Two short years after Goodhue finished the library, John Parkinson, John C. Austin, and Albert C. Martin designed Los Angeles City Hall, a taller version of the library in the same style, itself a solid concrete tower surmounted by a stepped pyramid. The city's two most notable monuments were Euclidean at a time when one of architecture's most influential theorists, Italian architect Aldo Rossi, espoused Rationalism, an architecture of the cones, cubes, cylinders, and pyramids that had always populated our cities, tabletops, and imagination. Rossi argued for an architecture that affirmed forms that existed in our collective architectural conscious and social memory.

Isozaki responded to Los Angeles's monuments by applying Rossi's notions of geometric fundamentalism to a building broken down into a village of structures. What I wrote in a 1986 *New York Times Magazine* feature on Isozaki still obtains today: "Not since French architectural visionaries of the eighteenth century has an architect used solid geometric volumes with such clarity and purity, and never with his sense of playfulness."

Combining Euclid's fundamental geometries with wit and dexterity, Isozaki made a landscape of forms that played off each other. He nested a barrel-vaulted library/conference room within a cubic armature and placed pyramidal skylights on cubic volumes housing offices and galleries. He clad the buildings in textured Indian sandstone, whose solidity gave a greater sense of presence to a 98,000-square-foot half-submerged architectural iceberg. The Platonic solids strengthened the sense of permanence of a complex that would otherwise be dwarfed by the surrounding towers: Isozaki's MOCA held its own within the surrounding scale of California Plaza.

Isozaki kept the offices, which needed natural light, and the store, which needed pedestrian frontage, above ground in a clustered village of forms, and submerged galleries in a dumbbell scheme below ground, the two sides separated by the entrance desk and a connecting corridor.

After obtaining their tickets, visitors stepped into a stunning introductory gallery that Frank Gehry said was "worth the whole building."

This first gallery is the building's sacred space, a luminous, beautifully proportioned cubic room, surmounted by a

monumental pyramidal volume, itself consummated by a glass pyramid that feathers light into the space below. If the highly literate Isozaki drew on Western architectural traditions, he remembered and cultivated Japanese traditions and imbued this inner sanctum with *Ma*, a Japanese concept of space that has been described as an emptiness full of possibilities, or as the silence between notes in a piece of music. Especially in this first gallery, Isozaki controlled the environment to a point of utter visual stillness, creating a resonant void that summoned at the moment of entry a visual hush that would last the visit, conditioning visitors for contemplating the art beyond.

At the extreme ends of the dumbbell scheme, two large free-span divisible spaces form the bulk of the galleries, with smaller galleries offering more intimate spaces.

Gehry had cracked the standing paradigm for contemporary museum design at The TC. In a sense Isozaki did the same to the extent that a Japanese ceramicist might fill the crack in a traditional vase with gold, to respect its age and to highlight a streak of chaos. Isozaki had added *Ma* to the Western vessel, conjuring out of his use of light a space that transcended the secular geometries of a Euclidean room.



Bird's-eye view of City Hall



Central Library reconstructed



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The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





The Isozaki building debuted with a Julia Brown exhibition, *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, a cross-town show divided between the two buildings. The show's premise was based on work that had been taken into an expanded field both physically and metaphorically: sculpture that had moved off its base, and painting away from its frame. If the museum had brought itself into an expanded field, the work in this show displayed the same concept but at the granular level of the artwork itself. Tellingly, it was in The TC that Los Angeles artist Chris Burden literally broke through the concrete floor to reveal both the earth and the foundations of the building. The metaphoric act called attention to the foundations on which this museum, and museums in general, operated.

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After the construction of the Isozaki building, the restless director continued to explore space beyond the museum walls: Koshalek was still, in some way, on the Montana prairie. He continued his extramural explorations using MOCA as base camp.

Koshalek's reach was elastic. In 1995, at Julia Brown's initiative and with the support of donor Virginia Dwan, MOCA acquired Michael Heizer's brilliant earthwork in Nevada, *Double Negative*, a monumental cleft the sculptor dynamited on either side of a mesa curving around a deep canyon. The two clefts—the double negative—hyphenated the gulf between the two sides.

But Koshalek was also an urban activist in his own neighborhood and on his own block. He co-chaired Governor Gray Davis's Architecture Selection Committee, which chose Thom Mayne of Morphosis to design the CalTrans office building several blocks away. Built at market-rate prices, Mayne deployed the structure around a major plaza facing City Hall, which it bracketed and featured within its architectural frame. CalTrans was an early design that structured environmental energy-saving tactics into its fabric. A folded roof plane shielded the roof and its skylights, and a double facade with a sun-screen protecting the weather wall, created a buffering micro environment between the building skin and the sunscreen. The architect broke planes out from the volume of the building like guillotine blades and sculpted

super graphic numbers into facades made of inexpensive industrial materials. Koshalek had succeeded in bringing the avant-garde out of the museum and into the city-scape in a governmental building that was anything but safe and bureaucratic.

But Koshalek's major success as an urban architectural activist was chairing the committee that selected Gehry to design Disney Hall, a choice that involved considerable social engineering over the strenuous objections of Disney family lawyers (they didn't like plywood and chain link). Running MOCA on an avant-garde agenda ran against the grain of downtown's socially conservative business community, producing at times confrontations, especially on the Bunker Hill Gold Coast. Remembering MOCA's own in-house political problems with trustees on the Architecture Committee, Fred Nicholas established a politically independent jury of experts to judge the Disney competition and protect its integrity (the jury included Getty director John Walsh, LACMA director Earl Powell, and USC and UCLA architecture deans Robert Harris and Richard Weinstein, respectively).

After years of delay and cost escalation, Diane Disney Miller (one of Walt and Lillian's two daughters) confided to Koshalek that she was about to give up on the long-delayed, financially depleted project, Disney Hall. Koshalek went into action. The museum deployed two construction trailers that would be used as an outreach effort to explain the building to the public. Inside, on the MOCA plaza on Grand, Koshalek staged a round-the-clock monographic show featuring Gehry's designs for the concert hall, which ran for several months. Koshalek put the full prestige of MOCA and his own reputation behind Gehry's design for the building in order to rescue the project from what the *L.A. Times* called its "financial mire." In fact, the show helped Mayor Richard Riordan raise the money necessary to fill in the building's shortfall. For Koshalek, building downtown was a way of building his institution and the city itself.

Always interested in the larger space, Koshalek approved one of the rare shows in a major American museum that looked at urban planning, *Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public Realm*. Then, in 1999, he and assistant curator Dana Hutt brought city planning to a whole

**BUT KOSHALEK WAS ALSO AN URBAN ACTIVIST IN HIS OWN NEIGHBORHOOD AND ON HIS OWN BLOCK. HE CO-CHAIRING GOVERNOR GRAY DAVIS'S ARCHITECTURE SELECTION COMMITTEE, WHICH CHOSE THOM MAYNE OF MORPHOSIS TO DESIGN THE CALTRANS OFFICE BUILDING SEVERAL BLOCKS AWAY.**





UNDER KOSHALEK, ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM AND THEIR COGNATE, SPACE, WERE DRIVING FORCES FOR MOCA, FOR ITS BUILDINGS, FOR ITS PROGRAMS, AND FOR THE VERY IDEA OF THE CITY. ARCHITECTURE AS A TEXT AND SUBTEXT RAN THROUGH HIS TWENTY YEARS.

new level of museum outreach. With a decentralized power structure centered on the City Council rather than the mayor, Los Angeles has always had a weak city-planning department that has taken a passive rather than pro-active position on its own mission. Koshalek decided to invite the city's three architecture schools to conduct independent urban research coordinated by architect Thom Mayne, then teaching at UCLA. Over the course of a year, the students compiled national, regional, and local data, mostly as it pertained to the downtown area between the freeways, and generated urban-planning initiatives, among them plans that no agency had previously considered. Students made proposals for a mass-transit node, a university with a spur that reached across the Los Angeles River to the city's east side, a sports park around the Staples Center Arena, a housing proposal with an environmental agenda, and a Los Angeles River Park proposal in the straits north of Chinatown.

They eschewed the constraints of traditional urbanism based on zoning and rejected Modernist principles of clean-slate renewal, choosing instead an integrative strategy of layering new mixes of uses onto existing conditions. As in MOCA's own museum shows, the study took an interdisciplinary approach in which architecture was one expertise among many brought to the proposals. The results of the initiative were eventually published in *L.A.* Now as a two-volume set.

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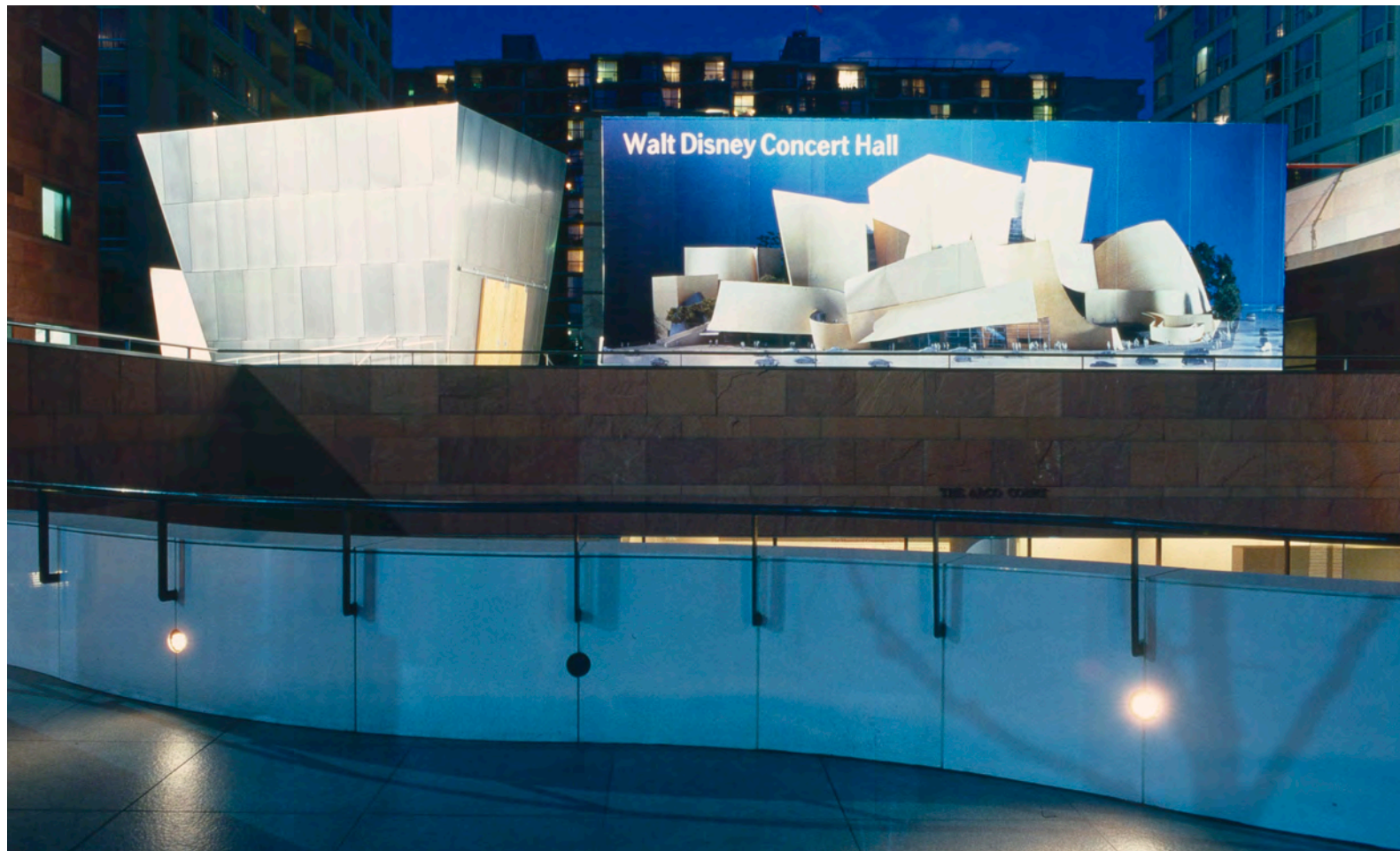
The story of architecture at MOCA may pivot on its two buildings, but Koshalek in turn pivoted the institution itself to expand the museum's reach and outreach. An extrovert, Koshalek extroverted the museum, opening and expanding it. That was possible because downtown, which had been largely vacated during L.A.'s suburbanization, was not culturally occupied. The middle class no longer slept there. It had no constituency. MOCA stepped into a creative vacuum, an open field, and its institutional imagination expanded. As Julia Brown said: "There was a sense of not having to be burdened by a prior history, of being able to make something new."

The move into downtown coincided with a receptive period in American cultural life, as the arts became interdisciplinary and as performance and installation art

moved beyond the closed spaces of galleries into the field and wide public acceptance.

Under Koshalek, architecture and urbanism and their cognate, space, were driving forces for MOCA, for its buildings, for its programs, and for the very idea of the city. Architecture as a text and subtext ran through his twenty years. Architecture was a vehicle that opened up the museum to the city, and the city to the museum. Buildings didn't wall and institutionalize the museum; instead the museum de-institutionalized the buildings. It may be a truism, at least among architects, to say that their art defines an institution and casts its character, but in MOCA's case, Koshalek seeded the character of the institution before either of its buildings were built.

That character persisted through two decades of Koshalek's tenure. He spatialized the institution beyond the walls of the buildings. He turned space into a practice, into a building block of institutional construction. Space was his brick. MOCA was much larger than its footprint.



Walt Disney Concert Hall: *A Celebration of Music and Architecture*, 1996, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





Frank Gehry, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles



# THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART:

ALMA RUIZ

## A DETAILED CHRONOLOGY,

1979–  
2000

AND  
PERSPECTIVES

William C. Agee  
Kerry Brougher  
Julia Brown  
Erica Clark  
Jacqueline Crist  
Tom Finkelpearl  
Amy Gerstler  
Robert Gober  
Ann Goldstein  
Ann Hamilton  
Roni Horn  
Mary Jane Jacob  
Christopher Knight  
Richard Koshalek  
Barbara Kruger  
Julie Lazar  
Jean Lipman  
Dominique de Menil  
Suzanne Muchnic  
Marisela Norte  
Alma Ruiz  
Paul Schimmel  
Rita Schreiber  
Elizabeth A. T. Smith  
John Walsh  
Marcia Simon Weisman  
Benjamin Weissman





Inaugural ceremony, 1986, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

### THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART: A DETAILED CHRONOLOGY, 1979-2000

“There is only one question we, as leaders of a museum, must ask: what is best for the institution, not for each of us.”

— Morton M. Winston, Chair,  
MOCA Acquisitions and Collection Committee

MOCA was willed into being thanks to the vision of a dedicated group of local citizens, at a time when Los Angeles was the only city of its size in the United States without a museum devoted solely to contemporary art. Initially MOCA had no building, no funds, and no collection—only the mission and passion to create an international art institution that could rise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the recently perished Pasadena Museum of Art. MOCA assumed its mantle assisted by those who understood their role as leaders and benefactors with an innate sense of civic commitment. The new museum’s forward-looking program quickly brought renown to itself and to a city striving to become a legitimate world-recognized art center.

This detailed chronology creates a narrative that begins in 1979 with the first talks about founding a museum—initially, a museum of modern art, but quickly morphing into one representing the art of our time—and ends shortly after director Richard Koshalek stepped down in the summer of 1999. In these two decades under Koshalek’s leadership, MOCA garnered a worldwide reputation as a preeminent forum for contemporary art, architecture, and the performing arts. During this period, the museum presented 208 exhibitions organized by brilliant, idiosyncratic curators, established a network of artistic collaborations and a traveling exhibitions program with preeminent museums in the United States and abroad, and acquired a superb core permanent collection.

The information for this history took many months to gather. My sources included board-meeting minutes from 1980 to 2000 and the many publications that accompanied the exhibitions, reviews, and articles in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, and other media, and the many interviews conducted for this publication with artists, curators, board members, architects, city leaders, and others who were close to the museum early on. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I could not access the MOCA archives and certain other local resources, but fortunately, founding MOCA trustee Betye Monell Burton, who was instrumental in the museum’s growth as the second woman trustee after Marcia Simon Weisman, graciously provided access to her extensive files. Richard Koshalek’s extraordinary memory also provided corroboration for numerous events, and many other observers confirmed his recollections as well.

Arriving at MOCA in February 1984, only three months after the museum had opened its doors, I was swiftly thrust into the art of the present and became a firsthand witness to the magic of the artist’s creative process. Until then, my degrees in art history and Italian language and literature, as well as my years in Europe, had immersed me in events, artifacts, and artists from centuries ago. Revisiting the museum’s early decades for this book brought vivid memories of my initial encounters with contemporary art. To be at MOCA, where artists regularly visited, and to engage in conversation with them and be privy to their creative ideas during exhibition planning, was truly revelatory. Art history was being made right there, and I had a front seat.

Since leaving MOCA in 2015, I have become an avid observer of museums in general. Nothing could have prepared me (or countless colleagues) for the unprecedented stresses on these institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic, stresses further complicated by unprecedented attention to the diversity, inclusion, access, and equity issues that have simmered for years. As I read about these challenges, I reflected on MOCA’s early nimbleness and the staff’s focused vision, and how those qualities helped transform the museum from a novice institution to an established, deeply respected beacon for contemporary art in a relatively short period. From the get-go, MOCA made things happen.

MOCA occupies a cherished place in my life, and I cannot overstate the importance of my time there in shaping my professional career and personal growth. To this day, the museum’s founding and early years seem miraculous to me. This chronology depicts the efforts, struggles, and triumphs of a group of individuals who together achieved a seemingly unreachable goal. MOCA’s history is like no other, and I hope that readers delight in its uniqueness and feel compelled to visit the museum for the first time or return after a long absence.



Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley publicly endorses the possibility of founding a museum of contemporary art. The Mayor’s Advisory Committee is created for this purpose. Chaired by William A. Norris, the committee includes Marcia Simon Weisman (vice chair), Eli Broad, Betye Monell Burton, Gary Familian, Sherri Geldin, Gary Gilbar, Maureen Kindel, Robert F. MacLeod Jr., Fran Savitch, and Ira Yellin.

Soon after, the Artists Advisory Council is formed. Council members meet regularly for two years to assist on the museum’s early planning. In a November letter to Norris, the council states that “we are prepared to undertake the responsibility to represent the artist community of the Los Angeles area at large in all facets of the planning and negotiating, i.e. (1) design of the museum and grounds, (2) formation of the museum policies and the formation of the board of directors, (3) the decision process of choosing the director, and (4) the financing and grant processes.” Led by DeWain Valentine, council members include Lita Albuquerque, Peter Alexander, Karen Carson, Vija Celmins, Guy Dill, Fred Eversley, Sam Francis, Robert Heinecken, Robert Irwin, Gary Lloyd, Peter Lodato, Joe Ray, Roland Reiss, Alexis Smith, and Tom Wudl. Chuck Boxenbaum, Stanley Grinstein, Coy Howard, Jack Quinn, and Pat Boltz serve as advisors and Joyce Dever as administrative coordinator.

The trustees receive a letter from Donald W. Cosgrove, acting administrator for the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), a federally funded organization tasked with what the parlance of the time called urban renewal. Cosgrove suggests downtown as a possible location for the museum. Conversations ensue, and CRA director Edward Helfeld offers for development an 11.2-acre site, the last remaining parcel of free land on Bunker Hill’s California Plaza. William A. Norris negotiates the agreement that provides the land and money for the museum’s construction on Grand Avenue.

Seven members are named to the founding Board of Trustees: Leon O. Banks, Eli Broad, Robert Irwin, William A. Norris, Max Palevsky, Robert Rowan, and Marcia Simon Weisman.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) is founded. Los Angeles will finally have a museum devoted solely to contemporary art.

In July a Founding Endowment Campaign (Capital Campaign I) is officially launched by Gary Familian (chair), along with art patron Eli Broad, venture capitalist Max Palevsky, and Robert O. Anderson, head of Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). Each member pledges \$1 million, and the campaign vows to raise another \$7 million in one year in order to meet the CRA’s requirement for construction to begin. Once the goal is reached, the campaign extends under the guidance of ARCO’s CEO William F. Kieschnick, who raises an additional \$3.2 million. (The ARCO gift is solicited by DeWain Valentine, chair of the Artists Advisory Council.)

MOCA continues to grow its board, adding Sam Francis, Betye Monell Burton, and Gary Familian as well as renowned international collectors Dominique de Menil and Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo.

The trustees initiate a search for a museum director. They invite Pontus Hultén, former director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and founding director at the Musée National d’Art Moderne at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and Richard Koshalek, formerly curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and director of the Fort Worth Art Museum in Texas, and current director of the Hudson River Museum in New York’s Westchester County, to discuss a possible collaboration. Along with Sam Francis, Hultén and Koshalek meet in a private room at the Sky Club in Manhattan’s Pan Am building. Among themselves they agree that Hultén should be director and Koshalek deputy director and chief curator. In August the trustees announce the appointments, and Hultén and Koshalek officially begin work on December 1.

MOCA’s inception was in great part based on the opportunity to contribute to the revitalization and health of downtown Los Angeles. So, with an eye to maximizing the public’s engagement, the museum’s programming from its founding included the performing arts, film, dance, and architecture. Inclusion was in the museum’s DNA.

Once the warehouses that were to become The Temporary Contemporary were found, the hope was to integrate the surrounding vacant spaces into the museum, creating a curated public site that would host a broad artistic agenda. The majority of programs in this open-air “gallery” would be organized by MOCA, but many other downtown institutions would also be invited to have a presence, including the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Mark Taper Forum, the Colburn Community School, the Central Library, as well the Central Avenue jazz scene. This approach was to mirror what happened during the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival, which brought in artists from around the world to great acclaim. The working title for this new urban gathering space—the “West Coast BAM”—paid tribute to the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s wide-ranging explorations and achievements, with the goal of periodically collaborating with that organization as well.

With the enthusiastic support of the neighboring JANM and its president Irene Hirano, the L.A. architects Hodgetts + Fung, noted for their original solutions to cultural and educational challenges, were commissioned to design an outdoor cultural complex on the five-acre site directly in front of The TC. Their master plan also encompassed the Little Tokyo commercial strip that backed directly onto The Temporary Contemporary.

Hodgetts + Fung’s vision was prescient. It outlined an ecumenical domain in which high and low, pop and classical, and various national traditions came together in a celebration of the heterogeneity that, more than anything, defines Los Angeles. To facilitate the widest possible range of programs, the architects also incorporated then-radical technologies into the plan, making the space a “machine” capable of supporting a variety of events: it was to be a brilliant fusion of the utilitarian and the ceremonial, an extension of the “rough-hewn mechanism” of The Temporary Contemporary itself.

The first stages of the plan were about to be realized just before the departure of MOCA’s director [Richard Koshalek] in 1999. While everyone involved hoped that the completed site would come to fruition, due to institutional and city leadership changes it was never built. With the rise of other downtown cultural amenities in the past twenty years, however, the original vision—and the larger need for vibrant community gathering spaces throughout Los Angeles—is more valid than ever today.







Gene Burton, Mayor Tom Bradley, and Betye Monell Burton



The Temporary Contemporary pre-renovation, 1983, Little Tokyo, Los Angeles  
Pontus Hultén, Richard Koshalek, and Marcia Simon Weisman, opening night, *Available Light*, 1983, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



Dr. Peter Ludwig and Seiji Tsutsumi are named as trustees, expanding the board's international representation.

An Architecture Committee is formed by Max Palevsky (chair), Sam Francis, Hultén, Robert Irwin, Coy Howard, and Koshalek. The committee draws a list of two hundred potential architects to design the museum on Grand Avenue; the finalists are Edward Larrabee Barnes, Frank O. Gehry, Arata Isozaki, Richard Meier, Kevin Roche, and James Stirling. After intensive interviews, the field is narrowed to Isozaki and Meier. Both architects visit the building site, and the board selects Isozaki. MOCA will be the Japanese architect's first major commission in the United States. His official advisors are real-estate attorney Frederick M. Nicholas as well as Koshalek, Marcy Goodwin, and Irwin, who all work closely with Isozaki on the design and construction of the museum.



Mayor Tom Bradley, Richard Koshalek, Marcia Simon Weisman, Frederick M. Nicholas, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

### The Early Days / Julia Brown

In the early days of MOCA, we were a small staff, working under Richard Koshalek's direction. I was the first curator to be hired. It was a tumultuous time, with major pressures brought to bear on the new institution and all of us from multiple constituencies wanting to be heard. The artist community, who had long felt neglected, wanted a museum that would champion their work and bring dynamic exhibitions and programming to Los Angeles. Collectors and galleries had strong opinions as to what the museum should be. The new board was feeling the weight of its responsibilities and sorting out the levers of power to be engaged in forming a new cultural institution. And of course, over all, there was huge pressure to secure financial, civic, and community support for the museum. We were in borrowed offices, without an exhibition space, forming our institutional identity without a building yet to define and house it.

Richard was the propulsive center of gravity, energy, and vision for MOCA. His positive and unflagging enthusiasm and generous spirit, his leadership and creativity, was the driving force bringing together the diverse and complicated elements necessary to create the new institution. He navigated the choppy currents of the political and personal dynamics of the board, raised substantial funds to support the museum and its programs, pulled in collaborators and empowered them, and assembled a great staff. The staff shared his commitment to MOCA and its dream, and worked and struggled alongside him to bring it to fruition.

It was his support that allowed me to do the work I did at MOCA. In the throes of our institutional development, but without a space yet to be a museum, I told Richard I wanted to go out into the city and the surrounding area to visit studios and talk to people in the arts community. With his encouragement I drove all around Los Angeles, north to Santa Barbara, south to San Diego and Long Beach. I engaged in extensive research plus far-ranging conversations with artists, collectors, gallerists, critics, writers, other curators, and art enthusiasts seeking out interesting work, and went to as many studios as I could. These visits begot more visits, as artists I met with told me about other artists I didn't yet know.

The range and quality of the work I saw was extraordinary and from these studio visits came much of our first program of individual artist exhibitions at The Temporary Contemporary. From its inception MOCA was dedicated to the creative individual and to enabling the vision of the artist. The exhibitions were designed in concert with the artist, and the catalogues and other publications included artist interviews or selections of their writing in order to give further voice to their ideas.

Among the artists whose exhibitions were presented simultaneously in The TC in the summer of 1985 were Mary Corse, Bill Viola, Gronk, and Jo Ann Callis. Assistant curator Jacque Crist and I worked closely with each artist to determine the selection of works, and with John Bowsher to realize their exhibition presentation. It was Bill Viola's first museum exhibition in L.A. For the other artists it was their first solo museum exhibition. Each of these artists was chosen for the quality and innovation of their work within the field and medium in which they were working.

Mary Corse carried on the vision of the Light and Space artists. Her light-filled paintings incorporated materials such as glazed clay, or glass microspheres, or tiny metal squares within paint to activate the surface and create luminosity that seemed to dissolve the painting in space. Gronk was a founding member of ASCO, a multimedia collective of Chicano artists based in East L.A. that was active in the 1970s and '80s. His vibrant murals and performances brought the explosive power of street art into The TC. Jo Ann Callis, one of the important practitioners of fabricated photographs, created mysterious stories through juxtaposition of objects and figures in brilliant color and deep tones of black and white. Bill Viola, one of the first artists to incorporate video as a vital aspect of contemporary art, and a pioneer in expanding its capacity technologically and in terms of the reach of its individual and universal content, was represented by major architectural video installations and new videotapes.



MOCA's plan to open in tandem with the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles is made unfeasible by financing complications. Koshalek recommends that the board consider an alternative facility to mount exhibitions of contemporary art as part of the Olympic Arts Festival, and a search begins for a space that can serve as a temporary museum.

Working with Donald Cosgrove, museum administrator Sherri Geldin finds some vacant buildings on the 200 North block of Central Avenue in the downtown neighborhood known as Little Tokyo. The board approves two adjoining warehouses as MOCA's temporary home, and a five-year lease is signed for \$1 per annum (in 2000 the city extends the lease to ninety-nine years). The museum chooses Frank O. Gehry to renovate the warehouses, and museum offices are set up nearby at 428 Boyd Street. Graphic designer Ivan Chermayeff comes up with the new museum's name, The Temporary Contemporary, aka The TC.

While MOCA's permanent building is being erected on Grand Avenue, Frederick M. Nicholas, along with Koshalek and Geldin, plays a key role in helping Gehry transform the Little Tokyo warehouses into The TC. To help fund the renovation and under the guidance of Sam Francis, MOCA publishes *Eight by Eight*, a signed limited-edition portfolio of original prints by artists Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, David Hockney, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Andy Warhol, with the box and front-end piece designed by Joseph Kosuth. Gemini G.E.L. prints the portfolio, and ARCO contributes a \$500,000 grant toward the \$2.5 million building-renovation costs.

Koshalek and the museum staff coin the concept of the “Guerrilla Museum,” later called the Transitional Museum—a series of exhibitions and performing-arts programs that unfold in different downtown locations, including at The TC. The Guerrilla Museum continues until the opening of the California Plaza building in December 1986.

As part of the Guerrilla Museum, MOCA commissions Maria Nordman to create a work in a building adjacent to The TC. *Yang-na* (a reference to the indigenous people who inhabited the land near the Los Angeles River) opens at 315 North Alameda, in a building scheduled for demolition, for one day only. Other exhibitions are programmed around The TC.

After two years as director, Hultén announces his departure from the museum to return to France. The board appoints Hultén to the newly created post of founding director and names Koshalek museum director.

After two years of debates, changes, and modifications, Isozaki's design for the building is approved by the CRA and the museum's Architecture Committee. The architect's model and plans receive critical acclaim from *Time*, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, *Art in America*, and many other publications.

Trustee Panza di Biumo writes to Koshalek expressing his interest in placing works from his collection in a public institution outside of Italy and his concern for finding the appropriate place to house the works. Though still without funding resources, the museum seizes the opportunity to acquire eighty important works by seven American and two European artists. After several months of discussions headed by Morton M. Winston, chair of the Acquisition and Collection Committee, and assisted by Eli Broad and Koshalek, the museum passes a resolution in December to purchase the collection. The agreement is ratified in early 1984, giving the young museum instant recognition as a major collecting institution.

Frank O. Gehry completes his renovation of The TC. In September MOCA curator Julie Lazar produces the pre-inaugural event, a performance piece called *Available Light*, conceived by choreographer Lucinda Childs, composer John Adams, and stage designer Gehry. Beverly Emmons designs the lights and Ronaldus Shamask the costumes. Photographers Grant Mudford and Garry Winogrand capture the event, and Susan Sontag contributes a catalogue essay.

In the months leading to the opening of The TC, Robert J. Fitzpatrick, then president of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), says, “MOCA is like a work of conceptual art,” adding, “It is quite amazing that a museum which doesn't even have a temporary building open and hasn't yet done an exhibition has already transformed the nature of the artistic community in Los Angeles.”

On October 12 groundbreaking begins for the building on Grand Avenue, with an approximate completion date of April 1986. When completed, the California Plaza development will comprise the museum, three office towers, a luxury hotel, the Bella Lewitzky Dance Gallery, residential buildings, parks, plazas, cinemas, restaurants, and retail stores.

The TC officially opens in November at 120 North Central Avenue. Betye Monell Burton, a former Pasadena Museum of Art trustee, organizes the opening festivities. Along with the staff, she also works on the implementation of the museum's support councils and its first education program.

The TC's inaugural exhibition, *The First Show: Painting and Sculpture from Eight Collections 1940-1980*, explores different aspects of the philosophy and process of collecting art. It includes 149 works of painting and sculpture by European and American artists culled from eight outstanding collections: Dominique de Menil (Houston), Howard and Jean Lipman (New York), Drs. Peter and Irene Ludwig (Germany), Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo (Italy), Charles and Doris Saatchi (Great Britain), and, from Los Angeles, the Robert A. Rowan Collection, the Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection, and the Weisman Family Collection. Julia Brown is the leading curator with the assistance of Hultén and Koshalek. According to Brown, “the show is almost like an introduction to the questions and problems the museum itself is facing. How do you form a museum for your own time and still have an eye on the future?”

*The First Show* draws over seventy-six thousand visitors in three months. Its success brings national and international art lovers to its unique and uniquely flexible space, one that approximates the ambience of an artist studio but has the ability to display work on a scale like nothing the museum world has yet seen. Trustee Lenore S. Greenberg summed up the view of many when she said, “This is what a museum can be. To me, that is the magic of the building.” Writing in *The New York Times*, John Russell called The TC “a model of offhand sophistication ... set in an area that is completely disassociated from high culture.” More recently, trustee Frederick M. Nicholas reminisced about the early days, stating, “Thinking back, I can see that The TC played a critical role in the arts in Los Angeles and without it I don't think there would be a MOCA.”

Senior curator Julia Brown, assistant curator Jacqueline Crist, and assistant curator Kerry Brougher organize *In Context*, twelve one-person exhibitions by contemporary American artists, including a MOCA-commissioned work by each artist, which begin to take place concurrently with *The First Show* and continue through 1985. They are:

- 1983–85 *Michael Asher: The Michael Asher Lobby*
- 1984 *Michael Heizer: 45°, 90°, 180°/Geometric Extraction*  
*Robert Therrien: Robert Therrien*  
*Maria Nordman: La Primavera, the Spring, Haru, Ch'un*  
*Douglas Huebler: Crocodile Tears*  
*Electronic Café*  
*Dan Flavin: “monuments” for V. Tatlin from Dan Flavin*  
*Mark Lere: Halo/Wheel*  
*Betye Saar: Selected Assemblages*  
*Betye Saar: Oasis*
- 1985 *Allen Ruppersberg: The Secret of Life and Death*  
*Mark Lere: New and Selected Images*  
*Manny Farber*

Inaugurating a period of extraordinary exhibitions that continues steadily through 2000, the museum positions itself as an international center of contemporary art. During this time, it presents approximately 250 thematic, historical, individual, and trans-media exhibitions. Also during this period, under the leadership of Koshalek, the museum begins to receive a series of remarkable collections, among them, the Beatrice and Philip Gersh Collection (1983-1994), the Panza Collection (1984), the Barry Lowen Collection (1985), the Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection (1989), the Max Yavno Collection (1989), the Panza Gift (1994), the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Photography Collection (1995), the Bequest of Marcia Simon Weisman (1996), and the Lannan Foundation Collection (1997). These, along with numerous other gifts, bring to MOCA's permanent collection a significant representation of European, New York, and California art; seminal works from an extensive collection of postwar, primarily American, photography; and a large number of works on paper.



Betye Saar: Oasis, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





The First Show, 1983, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Betye Saar: Oasis, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

## The Beauty and Mystery of the World: Comments from Collectors (gathered by Julia Brown and excerpted from *The First Show* catalogue, 1983)

### Rita Schreiber:

A man who knew very little about painting bought Jackson Pollock's *Number 1, 1949*. His wife found it so dreadful that she would not allow him to keep it in the house. So he tried to sell it in several places. When it got to Los Angeles, we heard about it from Fred Weisman and had it sent over to look at. We took down a very bright painting and hung the Pollock in its place. It seemed at first to be so dark that we felt that it drained all the energy from the other art around it. We decided not to keep it and rehanging our other paintings. But the room just seemed to die; the electricity was gone. We decided that we had to buy the Pollock. When the painting leaves my house for exhibition, I will be terribly unhappy.

### Dominique de Menil:

It is said that you judge a tree by its fruit, but in art you can also judge the fruit by the tree. Interesting art does not come out of people who carry no weight. Artists may be extremely different. Some may be silent, others may be very articulate, but whatever their nature, you feel a strong personality. I have never seen significant work come from people who did not have that personality.

What characterizes my collection? Maybe a passionate curiosity for the past and also a vulnerability to poetry—the poetry of a Cubist collage that sings a miraculous song, the poetry of an image that reveals the beauty and mystery of the world, whether the image is a small and tender Vuillard or a stunning Magritte. And tragic poetry also. The French poet Alfred de Vigny wrote that the most beautiful songs are the most desperate. I am very moved by the desperate art of Francis Bacon, very moved by art that reaches such poignancy and expresses the tragedy of man's ephemeral condition. I would like my collection to be displayed in such a way that it opens new vistas, that it reveals terra incognita—"islands beyond."

### Marcia Simon Weisman:

I think that if people keep an open mind, listen to information and ignore opinions, they will do very well on their acquisitions. I really do not care who likes what; I'm interested in what I like. This makes me think of the difference between me and my brother, Norton Simon. He used to ask me how I could buy all this "junk," rather than wait ten years and find out if it was really any good. I would say, "There are those who want to play it safe and those who fall in love. I fall in love, and maybe I'm stupid. But I don't think I've been wrong."

### Jean Lipman:

Quite a while ago, my husband Howard and I concluded that the three artists we most admired were Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and David Smith. The common denominator of our interest in these artists was the fabulous experience we had when first confronted with their work. We then began to analyze what they were doing, but our initial reaction was that it was exciting, fresh, marvelous, vigorous, and powerful, and we tried to acquire masterpieces by these artists.

These artists are now the old masters of the past generation, but when we began actively buying their work, not one of the three had sold anything of importance. Forty years ago when we first became interested in Calder, he was just starting to make large as well as small works. Now his name is synonymous with mobiles, and every baby has a Calder dangling in his or her carriage. Nevelson also had not yet sold any major work. Now she has an enormous following, partly because of her personal charisma, which I think may have interfered with her reputation as an important artist. In spite of her enormous international reputation, Nevelson has yet to be recognized here as one of the greatest American artists of all time.

Each of the David Smith pieces we purchased were the ones we thought the greatest of their particular series. He is still scarcely known by the general public. We have a work by Smith in our house, and not one in a hundred people who visits us has a clue as to what it is. When we tell them, they do not recognize the name at all. Smith hardly sold anything, not because he was not well known among collectors but because he really did not want to part with his work. When he died, virtually everything he had done during his lifetime was there at his home in Bolton Landing.



Barely three months after opening The TC, MOCA's membership reaches ten thousand. A year later it stands at sixteen thousand members.

The Panza Collection is officially accessioned by the museum. Count Panza's dream of placing the eighty works that represent the earliest part of his collection together in one institution is now a reality. He and his wife Giovanna travel to Los Angeles often. Discussions about displaying the Panza Collection at The TC begin.

MOCA participates in the Arts Festival for the 1984 Olympics with several exhibitions and performances:

*Automobile and Culture*, a survey of the car's history as object and image, features approximately thirty vehicles and two hundred works of art. Walter Hopps is the curator, and Pontus Hultén acts as director of the exhibition.

*Carplays*, a three-day festival of performance works in various downtown locations, examines how the automobile affects everyday life. Commissioned by MOCA and the Mark Taper Forum, Julie Lazar directs.



The Street Show, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

*10 Photographers: Olympic Images* presents selected works by ten photographers commissioned by MOCA to document the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. A collaboration between the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, MOCA, and the Olympic Arts Festival, the exhibition is organized by Graham Howe, with senior curator Julia Brown and assistant curator Kerry Brougher.

The museum debuts *The Territory of Art*, an ongoing program of commissioned works for broadcast on public radio stations throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, Austria, and Germany. It continues from 1984 to 1990, bringing together a broad array of talent across many disciplines, including visual and performance art, music, architecture, dance, theater, photography, storytelling, and poetry from all over the world. Julie Lazar is the executive producer.

Occluded Front (1985) / Jacqueline Crist

James Turrell arrived at MOCA's offices in the summer of 1984 to meet with our director Richard Koshalek, senior curator Julia Brown, and me, then an assistant curator working with Julia to organize Turrell's upcoming exhibition *Occluded Front* in The Temporary Contemporary.

Julia offered Turrell our 40,000-square-foot warehouse space where we hoped to realize his exhibition plans. However, Turrell had noticed a small, abandoned brick gas station adjacent to the entrance of The TC and suggested he would like to create a skyspace there in addition to the work he proposed inside the museum. Richard and Julia immediately agreed that it was a great idea to transform the tiny gas station into the experiential space Turrell eventually titled *Second Meeting*—inspired by the Quaker meeting houses that had influenced his adolescence. In effect he built a simple meeting house with a dome cut out in the ceiling through which a viewer could watch the daily transformation of day to night. Fortunately it does not rain very often in L.A. and so for four months, twice each day, viewers came to rest their heads on the slanted back support of built-in benches and adjusted their gaze to witness the perceptual phenomenon that occurred each day at sunrise and sunset when the light of day and the darkness of night came together to create what appeared to be the sky in the form of a dome with its edges attached to the opening of the skyspace.

Inside The TC we built site-specific rooms where Turrell used a “light projector” to make pieces that investigated how light inhabits space. We also built an intimate gallery space to exhibit the artist's plans for *Roden Crater*, the re-creation of an imagined extinct volcano in the Arizona desert, a large-scale work that is still ongoing.

In addition we created another large interior space so that viewers could enter a room bathed with continually changing shades of colored light that gave the illusion there were no walls or floor, no architectural details, just a space filled with light.

Ultimately we created for Turrell the opportunity to contextualize his thinking and creative process, all within a singular exhibition that allowed us to enter into the artist's process—and at a unique moment in the mid-1980s when we were free to explore a myriad of creative possibilities just for the sake of the exploration.



James Turrell, in *Occluded Front*, 1985, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



An atmosphere of excitement, anticipation, apprehension, cooperation, and wide-open possibility abounded during MOCA’s formation and its first years. But pressure to establish some kind of programming track record mounted while the museum’s new head-quarters were under construction. Richard Koshalek called from Los Angeles while I was transitioning from New York to be a founding curator and asked, “Can you look into starting an arts program for radio?” Based on MOCA’s declared mission to be a patron of artists and serve a multiplicity of audiences, *The Territory of Art* evolved into a public radio series of fifty half-hour original programs that freely explored a border-less, expansive region of cultures, languages, issues, creativity, and ideas. For me, the title aptly conveyed a message that the territory of art is everywhere and can be anything.

In *Border-X-Frontera*, for example, Guillermo Gómez-Peña (also a series host) and David Schein attack boundaries both artistic and political in their performance poem set along the U.S.-Mexico border. Originally a dance/theater piece, the Urban Bush Women’s *Song of Lawino* tells of an Acholi woman meeting Western culture head-on. Australian composer and sound designer Paul Charlier’s *Touring Machine* weaves news broadcasts, found sounds, music, and voice into a conceptual tapestry about the reshaping of cultures and ecologies in response to global tourism. *The Exile of Breyten Breytenbach* portrays the anti-apartheid activist, writer, and painter who was imprisoned in a South Africa “hanging jail” for expressing his conscience. Peter Sellars directed Velimir Khlebnikov’s Russian Futurist text *Zangezi* first for radio, then for the stage when it premiered at the opening of MOCA’s Arata Isozaki-designed building on Grand Avenue. *Zangezi* evokes the spirit of a prophet who has visions of universal communication through numbers.

Reaching far beyond MOCA’s gallery walls, *The Territory of Art* aired across the U.S. from April 1984 through February 1990 and was broadcast on networks in Australia, Austria, Canada, and Germany, demonstrating the rich diversity of art in our global culture as well as the dexterity with which radio can convey vision, innovation, and raise questions that may be more important than answers.

In developing the initial exhibitions program for The Temporary Contemporary, we focused on major figures and emerging artists either working in Los Angeles or with a strong connection to California, and those breaking new ground in the expanding evolution of contemporary art. The work coming from the west was of extraordinary originality and vision, and part of our mission was to support this work and allow it a full presentation and greater recognition in L.A. and on the national stage. A significant part of the program was to support artists in the making of new work and exploring modes of installation afforded by the architecture of The TC. Its scale and presence allowed us the opportunity to commission and present new work that took advantage of this unique and dramatic space.

Among those artists was Michael Heizer, whose earthworks in the desert landscape of California and Nevada gave new meaning to and expanded the capacity of sculpture, opening it up to vast dimensions, using the materials of the land itself and letting it interact with the sky and the elements. We wanted to try to allow for that force and scale in the work we commissioned for his exhibition at The TC. Heizer created 45°, 90°,180°/*Geometric Extraction*, a work that filled the spaces of the cavernous building and was a culmination of ideas the artist had been exploring for years. For the first time he was afforded the opportunity to build on a comparable scale working in response to an interior space, offering the experience of vast sculptural mass that enveloped the viewer.

The exhibition catalogue documented the evolution of Heizer’s early paintings, sculpture, and his monumental work in the landscape, and it explored his ideas through critical essays and a far-ranging interview with the artist.

Through this partnership with the artist and one of his earliest supporters, collector and gallerist Virginia Dwan, we were able to acquire one of Heizer’s most significant works of land art, *Double Negative*, built in the Nevada desert. In so doing MOCA expanded its collection to incorporate an iconic work in the history of sculpture that broke away from the confines of traditional museum space.



Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969, in Nevada, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



MOCA proceeds with a full exhibition schedule at The TC. The museum's permanent collection keeps expanding with works by Terry Allen, Dan Flavin, Charles Garabedian, Donald Judd, Bruce Nauman, Louise Nevelson, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Price, Robert Rauschenberg, Alexis Smith, and Tom Wesselman, among others. Instrumental in the negotiations that brought the Panza Collection to MOCA, trustee Morton M. Winston completes Virginia Dwan's unrestricted gift of Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (a donation initiated by Julia Brown and upon the recommendation of Koshalek). A 240,000-ton displacement of rhyolite and sandstone, *Double Negative* runs 1,500 feet in length and is located in the Nevada desert. It is the first earthwork to enter a museum collection anywhere.

The Acquisition and Collection Committee actively pursues outright and promised gifts to be included in the opening exhibition at the California Plaza building. In addition to accepting donations to the permanent collection, the museum moves to acquire *Departure from Egypt* (1984) by the German artist Anselm Kiefer, thanks to contributions from the trustees and community leaders. The Kiefer painting is the first work purchased by the museum after the acquisition of the Panza Collection.

As the construction of the California Plaza building progresses, Light and Space artist Robert Irwin proposes a landmark sculpture to be located in the middle of Grand Avenue and across from MOCA. *Grand Avenue Viaduct* (1985) is designed to allow a monumental ribbon of fluorescent light to flow from upper Grand Avenue into the street below. A dark thoroughfare with massive concrete walls and columns, lower Grand Avenue provides underground vehicular access to the buildings flanking it, including MOCA. By creating a continuous light sculpture that ties together the lower and upper streets, Irwin aims to fuse the practical with the artistic: *Grand Avenue Viaduct* would revitalize and provide needed lighting along the tunnel-like street as well as render Grand Avenue more pedestrian-friendly. This proposal, sadly unrealized, is initially sponsored by Bunker Hill Associates and MOCA. It becomes the subject of an exhibition at Pace Gallery in Beverly Hills.

After year-long preparations, *The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Panza Collection* opens in February with eighty works from the Abstract Expressionist and Pop Art periods that constitute the foundation of the museum's permanent collection. The works were gathered between 1956 and 1963 and represent Count Panza's commitment to a particular period or body of work by two European and seven American artists: Jean Fautrier, Antoni Tàpies, Franz Kline, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Mark Rothko, and George Segal. According to Koshalek, "The Museum of Contemporary Art will build its collection on these works and around the concept they embody: the private vision presented in a respectful way for the public and [with] a concentration on the work of individual artists." The exhibition is organized by senior curator Julia Brown and assistant curator Kerry Brougher with the installation design by Count Panza.

*Summer 1985: Nine Artists* comprises nine one-person presentations of work by Jo Ann Callis, Suzanne Caporael, Mary Corse, Guy de Cointet, Steve Galloway, Jill Giegerich, Gronk, Willie Herrón, and Bill Viola. As with the *In Context* series, *Nine Artists* represents another collaboration with the local art community. In subsequent years, gifts and acquisitions of Callis, Corse, de Cointet, and Viola artworks come into the museum's collection. The exhibition is organized by senior curator Julia Brown and assistant curator Jacqueline Crist.

*Occluded Front*, a selective retrospective of environmental installations by the artist, is an early recognition of the importance of his contributions to the California Light and Space movement. The exhibition, organized by senior curator Julia Brown and assistant curator Jacqueline Crist, continues to be one of the most significant shows of his work. Brown departs from MOCA after the exhibition closes, but she continues to work on *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, MOCA's California Plaza inaugural exhibition.

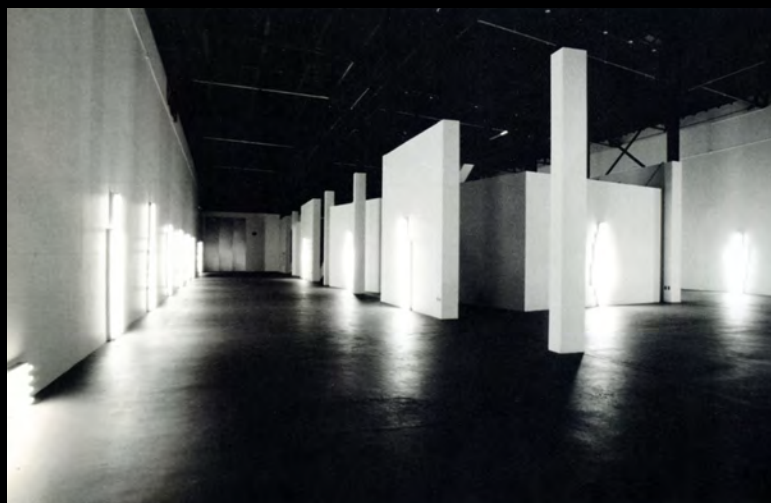
Trustee Morton M. Winston arranges for MOCA's first permanent collection acquisition grant. It comes from El Paso Natural Gas Company, a subsidiary of Burlington Northern, and is awarded for works by emerging California artists. Since its founding, the museum has received more than one hundred works through gifts and donations. However, the El Paso Natural Gas Company Fund for California Art allows the curators to directly select the works, which the museum commits to displaying in exhibition form in 1988. With this grant, works by Jill Giegerich, Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman, Stephen Prina, Peter Shelton, Alexis Smith, Mitchell Syrop, Bill Viola, and other artists enter the museum's permanent collection.







Dan Flavin, "monument" for V. Tatlin, 1969, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Dan Flavin: "monuments" for V. Tatlin, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



## "The Rothko Room" (1985) / Erica Clark

"One has to remember that the people who invented abstract art didn't think it was abstract at all. For them it was terribly concrete, and they were trying to get at the true essence of what a color was, what a sound was, and how we use these things to communicate."—Peter Sellars

One of the great privileges of working at MOCA was the ability to visit the galleries whenever I wished. This became a near-daily habit when the Rothko paintings were on view.

As a musician, I'm convinced that Mark Rothko had synesthesia, a neurological condition in which information meant to stimulate one of your senses stimulates several of them. In most people, this means that sounds trigger colors, but for Rothko, I believe, it went the other way. Each time I sat in the "Rothko Room"—the staggering assemblage of his paintings on view shortly after the Panza Collection came to MOCA—the air felt sonically charged. The very titles of the paintings, *Black on Dark Sienna on Purple*, *Red and Brown*, suggested much more than the colors they represented; for me they evoked actual beings endowed with the capacities that beings possess, both individually and collectively. A title such as *Reds and Violet over Red/Red and Blue over Red*, for example, connoted dialogue, conflict, and negotiation between larger forces—the processes associated with the creative act in every medium, not to mention most aspects of life. Every color that Rothko bestowed with a name emitted its own specific light, sound, and even associations of touch. Separately and in combination with the others, the colors became intricately and intimately bound to my own sequence of perceptions and reception.

In the "Rothko Room," I also recalled a very early childhood memory, of repeatedly asking my parents, with growing bewilderment, whether they were seeing the blue that I was seeing. As with awareness of death, this must have signaled my first acute knowledge of our individual and separate existence, and the impossibility of truly knowing what something looks/sounds/feels like to another person. All we can do is agree to agree that the blue is blue, and, on this tenuous foundation, we build our lives together. James Turrell remarked that "the history of art is the history of depicting light ... [the artist] makes the instrument that produces it the way they want." I think this is just one aspect of Rothko's art. His paintings are palimpsests. They bring light into your body, and each time you sit with them, new layers emerge both in them and in yourself. The critic Alex Ross wrote that when you play Brahms, the music listens to you as you listen to it. When you sit with the Rothkos, they observe you as you observe them. You reflect together.



Mark Rothko room, The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Panza Collection, 1985, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





My wife Jill and I were coming to the shows at The TC regularly. The biggest opening up for me, in my late-life education in contemporary art, was the *James Turrell* show (1985-86).

I hadn't paid attention. I didn't know about Robert Irwin; I didn't know about Larry Bell; I didn't know about all the other conspirators. But for me the Turrell show, which wasn't about learning, or reading, it wasn't about hearing Turrell talk, or hearing curators talk for that matter, it was just about spending a lot of time in those rooms. That was an experience that made the rest of my whole life quite different and more interesting.

For me the gift of The TC was that you didn't know what was going to happen next, and whatever it was, it was going to somehow expand you. That was true of the high points all the way through in those exhibitions. A *Forest of Signs* and other shows like that were my introduction—belated introduction—to stuff I'd been reading about, and frankly had been very skeptical about. Minimalism, generally, was not something I had any sympathy for. It seemed to me to be largely a matter of words and sham experiences by people—people faking it, you know, in the exhibitions. I had a very bad attitude about this.

Can I tell you a Turrell story? I must have come downtown, I don't know how many times to that show, because on weekdays you could be there by yourself. I'm going around and there's a smattering of other people, and I go into the biggest, darkest room through the light lock and sit on the bench. I do my usual thing, try to help my eyes get used to it, which is hard to do. It takes time, right? Maybe six or seven minutes in my case. But there, finally, it's there again!—on one wall, this faint sort of pinkish, reddish Rothko, and it was throbbing a little bit, or I thought it was. I became oddly curious—and I thought I'd take my own pulse, and when I did I found that those little fluctuations of light seemed to be in sync with my own heartbeat. I thought, what the ... ? Is there something in there, some electronic thing going on here? Then I realized that your rods and cones, or whatever the equipment is, responds to the blood flow and that's why the light is pulsing. I'm sitting there and just then I hear [bangs on table] bump, bump, a guy is bumping into the light lock and his wife is giving him a hard time: "Sit down, dear." Okay, so they sit down, and I'm trying to get my experience back and, um, at a certain point, I hear him get up and then there is a flash that makes me blind and the sound of the shutter. He says, "I don't know what's in here, but I got a picture of it. I'm leaving—you can stay."

I don't think I was alone. I think there must have been many, many, many people—thousands of us and maybe way more than that—who had our first important experiences of contemporary art at The TC. I was a lifelong resister and skeptic. I mean, I went to shows when I lived in New York in the 1960s and '70s, a very, very good time to be in New York. We were living on the Upper West Side; I was going down to the Village all the time, and then SoHo, but I had some things I needed to learn. Those shows at The TC taught without pontificating, without using a whole lot of precious language. They just had the experience there for you.

Of course, everybody loved the idea of going down to this leftover piece of L.A., which had its own grandeur. You look back over your shoulder from The TC and, oh my god, there's the skyline! How many times did we hear people say, I didn't know L.A. had a downtown!

The TC was a reason for very many people, including from out of town, to come and get excited about this major city, which was not the New York caricature of a city without a heart or without a center. It had a center; it just had several centers (laughs).

The TC was a wonderful spectacle of a big, unused, leftover civic building—so astutely refigured, without any sort of radical change of materials—in fact exactly what we thought in the early 1980s was going to be right for contemporary art. So that was a matter of pride—it was clever, wonderful, and anti-Getty, right? We were building at the high, high, high end—up high above and away from downtown L.A. MOCA on the other hand was building in the city—embedding itself not once, but twice in the city.



Led by chairman William F. Kieschnick, the museum begins a second capital campaign based on the successful opening of The TC and the imminent completion of its California Plaza building to underwrite MOCA for the 1980s. Capital Campaign II brings in \$25.6 million.

Under Koshalek's initiative, MOCA pioneers the inclusion of architecture exhibitions as an integral part of contemporary art. Between 1986 and 2000, the museum presents nine such exhibitions, ranging from shows devoted to the architectural history of a particular country (*Tokyo: Form and Spirit*), to monographic shows of the architects who designed the MOCA buildings (*The Architecture of Frank Gehry and Arata Isozaki 1960/1990 Architecture*), to other influential figures (*Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*), solo projects (Focus Series: *Out of Order: Franklin D. Israel*), thematic shows (*Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public Realm, Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*, and *At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture*), and advocacy projects (*Walt Disney Concert Hall: A Celebration of Music and Architecture*).

Trustee Leonard Vernon and his wife Marjorie embark on a donor project spanning two decades and culminating with a gift totaling 107 photographs from their collection in 2007. The gift includes an in-depth representation of Aaron Siskind, Anthony Hernandez, Henry Wessel, Paul Caponigro, and Minor White and photographs by Cindy Bernard, Ilse Bing, Bill Brandt, Barbara Kasten, Grant Mudford, Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston. An avid photography collector, Vernon was instrumental in securing the 1989 donation of 189 Max Yavno photographs along with a fund for photography exhibitions and programs. The Vernons' gift embodies their ongoing commitment to augmenting the museum's photography holdings.

MOCA establishes a traveling program to circulate its exhibitions to museums in the United States and abroad with the idea of building alliances through exhibition exchange and curatorial collaborations.

Douglas S. Cramer, MOCA trustee from 1983 to 1996, organizes the MOCA Art Auction, one of the first fundraising events of its kind, as well as several museum galas that bring together the new museum and the city's entertainment industry.

The building on California Plaza is completed. The staff moves into the structure in the spring. While settling down in the new building and preparing its inaugural exhibition to be held the first week of December, the staff presents the following exhibitions at The TC:

- *The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Barry Lowen Collection* is a gift of sixty-four paintings, sculptures, photographs, and drawings from the 1960s to the 1980s by thirty-eight artists. The collection is the third of eight that will distinguish the museum as having one of the pre-eminent collections of contemporary art in the United States. Before his death in September 1985, Lowen, a TV executive, worked with Koshalek in the planning of the exhibition and catalogue. An overview of contemporary art over three decades, Lowen's is a significant collection of Minimalism, Postminimalism, New Image

Painting, New Expressionism, and Postmodernism of the 1970s and '80s by some of the most brilliant proponents, among them, John Ahearn, Carl Andre, Richard Artschwager, Jennifer Bartlett, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Larry Clark, Eric Fischl, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, Elizabeth Murray, Susan Rothenberg, Robert Ryman, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Richard Serra, Cindy Sherman, Frank Stella, Cy Twombly, and Terry Winters. The exhibition is coordinated by research associate Ann Goldstein.

- *John Chamberlain* is a thirty-year retrospective of one hundred of this American sculptor's works, including works of painted steel, Plexiglas, paper, foam rubber, and aluminum foil, as well as selected collages, drawings, and paintings. The exhibition is organized by New York-based guest curator Julie Sylvester, whose ample knowledge of Chamberlain's work is reflected in her authorship of the catalogue raisonné. Done in association with MOCA, this publication also serves as the exhibition catalogue.

- *Tokyo: Form and Spirit*, a major architecture and design exhibition, explores the inventiveness and continuity of Japanese design from the Edo period (1603-1868) to the present. It features work by Arata Isozaki, the architect of MOCA's California Plaza building. The exhibition is organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in association with Japan House Gallery, New York.

Following a national search, the museum announces the appointment of Mary Jane Jacob as chief curator. Former chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Jacob begins her work at MOCA on a part-time basis in October until she assumes the position full time in February 1987. During her two-year tenure, Jacob organizes *Ann Hamilton: the capacity of absorption* (with Jacqueline Crist); *John Baldessari; Christian Boltanski: Lessons of Darkness; Richard Deacon; Lothar Baumgarten; Mario Merz; Nancy Spero; Boyd Webb*; and *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* (with Ann Goldstein).

MOCA's permanent space, designed by Arata Isozaki, opens. A seven-day series of events celebrates the unveiling. Sunday, November 30, is reserved for the trustees and MOCA staff, and the building is dedicated the next day. In attendance are the trustees, Mayor Tom Bradley, the City Council, California Plaza principals, benefactors, the Artists Advisory Council, staff, and selected press. A press preview follows. From Tuesday to Friday, black-tie receptions take place to acknowledge museum supporters, among them, the inaugural-events underwriters, founders, the artists represented in the inaugural exhibition, the contributors and lenders to the inaugural exhibition, directors of other museums, members of the national and international art world, the architecture community, artists shown in previous MOCA exhibitions, artists represented in MOCA's growing permanent collection, donors to the permanent collection, annual donors, friends of the museum, and other members of the art community, including volunteers.

The inaugural exhibition *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, is organized by former MOCA senior curator Julia Brown and assistant curator Kerry Brougher. More than four hundred works by seventy-seven artists drawn from significant contemporary art movements, including Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and Pop Art, are displayed in both The TC and the new facility. Julia Brown, the exhibition curator, says, "This exhibition is an attempt to represent aspects of an evolution in which sculpture has moved away from its base and painting away from its frame, both physically and metaphorically." The participants are seen as individual artists represented by a significant body of work, with special attention given to California talent. The inaugural celebration continues through December 1987. When asked about the duration of the exhibition, Koshalek says, "In keeping with this museum's sense of contemporary art as a continuing experience, and in contrast to the trend of short-term blockbuster shows, we decided on the year-long exhibition schedule so that people can get to know the works, can live with them and integrate them through repeated visits. This exhibition is about ideas, and ideas require time." The accompanying catalogue is an opportunity for a new look at the art of the last forty years. It will be used as a catalogue and a history of contemporary art in colleges and universities.

A lecture-seminar program, jointly sponsored by MOCA and UCLA, is presented throughout 1987 in conjunction with the inaugural programs. Catalogue authors Achille Bonito Oliva, Germano Celant, Hal Foster, Thomas Lawson, Kate Linker, Ronald J. Onorato, and John Welchman participate in "On the Artist and Society," an all-day panel at which they discuss their writings. In subsequent months, lectures by T. J. Clark, Carol Duncan, Clement Greenberg, Robert Hughes, Hilton

Kramer, Lucy Lippard, Jean-François Lyotard, and Susan Sontag are held at UCLA. In addition to the MOCA-UCLA lecture series, the museum develops "Free at Noon," once-a-week informal twenty-minute discussions, to involve the downtown business audience.

As part of MAPARTS, the media and performing-arts element of the inaugural year, the museum co-produces the play *Zangezi: A Super Saga in Twenty Planes* with the National Theater in Washington, D.C. Peter Sellars directs, and the distinguished Beckett actor David Warrilow performs. *The Territory of Art* radio series, Part II, takes place with broadcasts in many cities across the United States, Canada, Australia, and Great Britain. Rounding out the media and performing-arts program is *The Earl King*, an interactive video installation by Grahame Weinbren. The MAPARTS program is organized by curator Julie Lazar.

Coinciding with the opening of the permanent building, under the leadership of MOCA education specialist Kim Kanatani, MOCA launches Contemporary Art Start (CAS). A joint undertaking between the museum, the Junior League of Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Unified School District, CAS aims to familiarize fourth-grade students (and their teachers and parents) with contemporary-art issues both in the classroom and through multiple visits to the museum. In time, CAS expands to second through sixth grade and involves an average of twenty-five hundred students a year in geographically diverse schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District. (After thirty-six years, CAS continues to be one of MOCA's most successful education programs.) The docent program, which started with the opening of The TC in 1983, is now expanded to encompass both buildings. Museum membership is now at twenty-six thousand members.



Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *The Knife Ship II*, 1986, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
L-R: Robert Espinoza, Eric Magnuson, Randall Brocket, Marc O'Carroll, Brenda Mallory, John Bowsher, Coosje van Bruggen, and Claes Oldenburg



**The Barry Lowen Collection / Christopher Knight, from his catalogue essay  
“Panofsky’s Hat: The Barry Lowen Collection” (1986)**

To form an important private collection of recent art requires a willingness to become engaged with an exacting process of questioning current directions and their sources in the past. In its retrospective view and simultaneous testing of the waters, *The Barry Lowen Collection* is marked by this necessarily dual appraisal. Even without knowing the specific alterations it underwent during the more than ten years of its assembly—and they were many, and of frequently precipitous nature—a sense of movement, of rigorous refinement, is unmistakable in the works gathered together here. The selection of the most recent work (recent in terms of the maturity of artistic vision) is surely less coherent than the provocative and illuminating tracing of a complex web of ideas from Minimalism to the heady developments of the closing years of the last decade and the beginning of our own. The reason for this edge of inarticulateness is twofold; because the shape of the collection was still in process, still being questioned at the time of Lowen’s death, and because the moment itself is still alive. Finally, it is the determined engagement with that very sense of life that constitutes the fundamental beauty of *The Barry Lowen Collection*.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #88*, 1981, The Barry Lowen Collection, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

**In the Process / Mary Jane Jacob**

I began in 1986 with one idea, a “local” artist—Ann Hamilton—who was on the rise for her ambitious installations making use of palpable, pregnant materials of the everyday like mirrors or eucalyptus leaves or starched white shirts; she had recently relocated to Santa Barbara. We had worked prior on an ambitious if not wholly successful project. I wondered: what could happen if resources opened up and curatorial pressure was applied? Our ensuing dialogue included staff, notably the brilliantly adept John Bowsher, and was manifested through a series of contractions and expansions as alternate proposals were honed, then erupted in a new form. Finally one gallery grew into three as the title, *the capacity of absorption*, came to also signify the institution's ability to create with artists.

To be *in the process* meant MOCA was a place to make, not just show art. For me, this unfolded each time: as Nancy Spero’s women (which she stenciled on the gallery walls) charged around Isozaki’s pyramid, or Mario Merz’s crocodile leapt up the walls in a trail of Fibonacci numerals, or when Christian Boltanski’s monuments transformed The TC into a cathedral. All of this lead the way for thirty artists to use the space to pose questions about context, meaning, and reality in *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, where Dara Birnbaum commanded the central atrium of The TC to reconceive fragments of TV images of women in *PM Magazine*, and Barbara Bloom created a space within a space to reinvent eighteenth-century décor in her own image with *The Reign of Narcissism*. The galleries became actors in the story presented.

Yet nothing would have been achieved had it not been for a belief in the potential of shared creativity. This played a part in expanding the practices of the artists and my own as well, as I shifted my curating from galleries to streets replete with histories and all-too-present social problems, taking forward the lesson of what artists and curators can do together.



Barbara Bloom, *The Reign of Narcissism*, 1988–89, *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, 1989, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



*Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, continues in both The TC and the California Plaza building. This comprehensive exhibition is complemented by a series of touring one-person shows, among them, *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings*, a survey exhibition of nineteen drawings and twenty-seven paintings ranging from early rectangular canvasses to more eccentrically shaped or fragmented works. The exhibition is organized by the Dallas Museum of Art and the Albert and Vera List Visual Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. MOCA's visibility grows with an extensive, year-long audience-development campaign called City Sections, which focuses on different neighborhoods starting with downtown Los Angeles. City Sections intends to “build a stronger and broader constituency by bringing the wealth of cultural opportunities available to the attention of Southern Californians.” In addition, banners are placed along the streets between MOCA and The TC, and two posters are produced for distribution throughout the city. A million brochures about the museum and the exhibition are printed and distributed throughout Southern California tourist spots in Long Beach, Palm Springs, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Orange, and San Diego counties. Coverage abounds in the national and international press.

Co-organized by MOCA and the Stedelijk Museum, *The Arts for Television* is a series of thematic programs of dance, music, literature, theater, and the video image, featuring the contemporary arts exhibited on television as a new forum. It is curated by curator Dorine Mignot of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Kathy Rae Huffman, curator/producer of the Massachusetts-based Contemporary Artists Television Fund, and administered by curator Julie Lazar.

Under the trustee leadership of Betye Monell Burton, support groups become an integral part of the museum, among them, the Volunteer Activities Council, Connections (docent program), the MOCA Projects Council, the MOCA Contemporaries, and the Curator's Council. As the leading volunteer group, the MOCA Projects Council develops and carries out frequent fundraising events for the museum. (In 2008, this council supports the first illustrated catalogue of MOCA's holdings, *This Is Not to Be Looked At: Highlights from the Permanent Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art*. The Projects Council continues to function today.)

Museum membership reaches thirty thousand members.

Frederick M. Nicholas, chair of the MOCA Board of Trustees from 1988 to 1993, selects Richard Koshalek to lead the Walt Disney Concert Hall Architecture Committee. The following year, alongside Koshalek, committee members John Walsh, Earl A. Powell III, Richard Weinstein, and Robert Harris select Frank O. Gehry's design.

The Education Department is established through a generous endowment from the W. M. Keck Foundation. MOCA hires its first director of education, Vasundhara (Vas) Prabhu, formerly of the H. F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University and the Boston Children's Museum.

MOCA-organized shows begin to travel in the United States and abroad. *The Arts for Television* is the first exhibition to travel. It tours three museums in the United States and nine in Europe. They are the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Gallery, London; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; Kunsthaus Zürich; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Centro Videoarte, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy; Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; and Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, Belgium.

*Bruce Nauman Drawings 1965-1986* encompasses approximately one hundred drawings by this Postminimalist artist. They represent a body of work related to and independent from the sculptures for which he is most widely recognized; it is organized by the Kunstmuseum in Basel. Concurrently with the exhibition, MOCA presents two video installations featuring clown characters and a four-day program of a selection of Nauman's videos created over the last twenty years.

*The Architecture of Frank Gehry* celebrates the career of this Los Angeles-based architect through more than two hundred fifty drawings, photographs, scale models, furniture designs, and full-scale architectural constructions. The exhibition, with an expansive view of Gehry's career, honors his legacy and connection to MOCA. The exhibition is organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

*STRIKING DISTANCE* features painting, sculpture, photography, works on paper, video, and sound installations by Jill Giegerich, Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman, Stephen Prina, Peter Shelton, Alexis Smith, Mitchell Syrop, and Bill Viola. MOCA acquires work by these and other local artists with funds from the El Paso Natural Gas Company Fund for California Art. Following its presentation at The TC, *STRIKING DISTANCE* travels to the Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara; the Fresno Arts Center and Museum; and Sonoma State's University Art Gallery in Rohnert Park, California. The exhibition is organized by assistant curator Ann Goldstein.

*Anselm Kiefer* consists of approximately seventy paintings, woodcuts, watercolors, collages, and book constructions. This German artist captures monumental images of landscape and architecture utilizing a variety of materials such as oil, sand, straw, tar, lacquer, and lead. The exhibition is organized jointly by The Art Institute of Chicago and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Set in the hollow spaces of The TC and divided into three galleries, *Ann Hamilton: the capacity of absorption* is a MOCA-commissioned installation that employs unusual elements such as a 14-foot megaphone, water, moss, an ocean buoy, sound, and a human participant, among others. The exhibition is organized by chief curator Mary Jane Jacob and assistant curator Jacqueline Crist.

For *Nancy Spero*, MOCA shows the artist's handprinted images on long paper scrolls as well as commissioned images printed directly onto the gallery walls. The exhibition is organized by Mary Jane Jacob; as she departs MOCA to return to Chicago, curatorial associate Susan Jenkins coordinates the completion of the exhibition.



Installation view of *Anselm Kiefer*, at Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1988



Perhaps my most unforgettable experience as a curator was working with Ann Hamilton on her monumental exhibition *Ann Hamilton: the capacity of absorption*. Set in the hollow spaces of The TC and divided into three galleries, this was a MOCA-commissioned installation that almost defies description. I still think about the first room, completely covered with wax—the walls, the floor, and the overwhelming fragrance of beeswax. A giant French horn hung from the ceiling and, on metal shelves spread over every wall, hundreds of small glasses from ceiling to floor contained magnets submerged in water that spun, making a mystical whirring sound, like a quiet wind through the trees. When a viewer entered the space, suddenly everything went quiet before the whirring continued; it was an extraordinary sensual experience. We built three 20-square-foot rooms which allowed viewers to move from one fantastical sensory experience to another. From the beeswax room you entered the middle room, where every surface was covered with moss, and you heard the subtle and gentle chirping of real crickets hidden within the mossy walls. I would describe the sensation as primordial. In the middle of this room was a long 3-foot-high table, approximately 12 feet by 3 feet, that was filled with water. At each end stood a person wearing a suit made by Ann that was covered from head to toe in moss. These moss-clad figures stood perfectly still while resting their hands in the water that covered the table. They stared directly at each other in silence across the length of the table. In the third room all of the walls were rubbed carefully and completely from floor to ceiling with powdered graphite, and the entire surface of the floor was covered by tightly laid lead type. The type was set in such a way that when you walked on the words you released the sound of whispering voices. There was also a giant metal ball attached by a huge chain to the wall.

The crew at MOCA was phenomenal in their support of Ann; they did everything she asked of them, from gathering moss at a Silver Lake pond to standing on ladders each day dipping rags in buckets of graphite to carefully rub the type in a singular circular motion as instructed by the artist. They ended each day covered in graphite. Of course we were only half finished when we ran over budget, but we had to keep going. We were sending trucks all over the U.S. to borrow tons of typesetting slugs from print shops everywhere. The installers had to track exactly where each load of slugs came from so it could all be returned to the print shops. Think of the administrative aspect of this work, not to mention the commitment by the preparators and all of us. Ann’s mother came for the month that the installation took and made soup for all of us every day, which helped us keep working.



Ann Hamilton: the capacity of absorption, 1988, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

The most valuable bequest received by MOCA to date, the Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection enters the permanent collection thanks to the efforts of the couple's daughter Lenore S. Greenberg, who joined the Board of Trustees in 1981 and served as president from 1984 to 1987 and again from 1989 to 1990. The Schreiber Collection, which is featured in an exhibition of the same name, includes thirteen artists and spans 1930 to 1960, representing pivotal moments in twentieth-century art. According to Koshalek, “The Schreiber Collection offers MOCA a strong foundation from which to present a cohesive history of art from early modernism to work of the present day.” The extraordinary collection features works by Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Giacometti, Arshile Gorky, Joan Miró, and Jackson Pollock, among others. Jack Cowart, department head and curator of twentieth-century art at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., says, “Bravo for L.A. It’s a stellar group with a breathtaking level of achievement by each artist. The works are monuments in the evolution of European and American art from the period before the Second World War to the early 1960s, and MOCA and the L.A. Basin are very, very lucky to receive them.” In presenting MOCA with this gift, Greenberg says, “It was my mother’s wish that these works of art remain in Los Angeles, where she and my father lived. It is especially gratifying that their collection is now to be given to MOCA for the enjoyment of everyone.” The exhibition is organized by associate aurator Elizabeth A. T. Smith.

*A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* displays the work of thirty artists, including Barbara Bloom, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Sherrie Levine, and Richard Prince, who have reshaped the American art scene since the late 1970s. Organized by chief curator Mary Jane Jacob, now professor and director of the Institute for Curatorial Research and Practice at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and assistant curator Ann Goldstein, the exhibition is titled to refer to the multiplicity of signs in the contemporary world and the artists’ examination into how these words and images function.

Organized by the Walker Art Center, *Marcel Broodthaers* is a chronological survey of works created between 1964 and 1975 in various media, including painting, sculpture, print, and photography. Broodthaers uses familiar objects such as eggshells, kitchen utensils, garden tools, furniture, and clothing in a way that is linked to Dada, Pop Art, Minimalism, and Conceptualism.

*Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses* is a groundbreaking exhibition that examines the innovative Case Study program of 1945-1966. It includes two reconstructions of Case Study postwar residential prototypes, original drawings, photographs, works of art, design objects, a historical timeline, videos, and many scale models. The exhibition is dedicated to Esther McCoy, Reyner Banham, Charles and Ray Eames, John Entenza, Raphael Soriano, Rodney Walker, and other key figures in the genesis and interpretation of the Case Study House program. Architects Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung collaborate on this project over many years and are a driving force behind the exhibition design. The museum’s Architecture and Design Council plays a supporting role too. The

exhibition also features a design competition of new multifamily and senior-citizen housing, sponsored jointly by MOCA and the Community Redevelopment Agency, which is represented by scale models and drawings from six international architects. Franklin/La Brea, Adèle Naudé Santos’s winning design, is inaugurated in North Hollywood in 1995. The exhibition is organized by associate curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith.

The Yavno Estate donates 189 photographs representing Max Yavno’s work on commercial projects and his personal and photodocumentary studies from Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Jerusalem, along with a grant to support photography exhibitions and programs at the museum. Spearheaded by trustee Leonard Vernon, the donation is celebrated in *Selections from the Permanent Collection: The Photographs of Max Yavno*. The project director for the exhibition is research associate Connie Wolf.

Before year’s end, MOCA announces a second gift to the collection by Beatrice Gersh, a trustee since 1981, and her husband Philip. *The Beatrice and Philip Gersh Collection* includes key works that had been given to MOCA over the years and works designated to enter the museum’s collection in the future, along with selections from the couple’s private collection. The exhibition features forty-five paintings, sculptures, and drawings from 1912 to 1988, with work by Willem de Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Elizabeth Murray, Jackson Pollock, Gerhard Richter, Susan Rothenberg, Ed Ruscha, Alexis Smith, David Smith, and Frank Stella. The exhibition is organized by associate curator Kerry Brougher.

Since the California Plaza building’s opening three years before, MOCA has made several acquisitions and accepted a steady flow of art donations. Terry Allen, John Baldessari, Barbara Bloom, Christian Boltanski, Vija Celmins, Sarah Charlesworth, John Chamberlain, Ellsworth Kelly, Lee Krasner, Mary Corse, Craig Kauffman, Sherrie Levine, Sol LeWitt, Ed Moses, Louise Nevelson, Paul Outerbridge Jr., Laurie Simmons, May Sun, James Turrell, Edward Weston, and Gary Winogrand are some of the artists who are added to the permanent collection during this period.





Philip and Beatrice Gersh, Beverly Hills



Richard Koshalek, Marcia Simon Weisman, and Lenore S. Greenberg, 1990, Beverly Hills

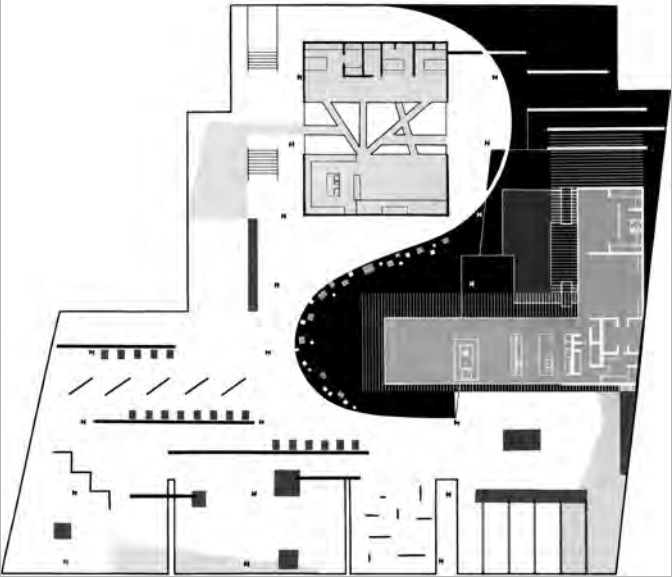


Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses (1989) / Elizabeth A. T. Smith

In my early days as a (then) assistant curator, I was the only person at MOCA besides Richard Koshalek who had any training or demonstrated interest in architecture. Richard decided MOCA should do an exhibition on the Case Study Houses, a remarkable series of modern homes designed and constructed in Los Angeles and environs between 1945 and 1966, and he assigned me to be its curator/project manager. My process began with a deep dive into research on this then-almost-forgotten chapter in Los Angeles history, visits to all the existing houses, and outreach to everyone originally involved who was still living. I met with and interviewed architects Ralph Rapson, Edward Killingsworth, Calvin Straub, and Pierre Koenig; photographers Julius Shulman and Marvin Rand; writers Esther McCoy and Elaine K. Sewell Jones; artists and designers of the era such as Ruth Asawa, Ray Eames, and Edward Frank of Frank Brothers furniture; original clients of the houses; and others. Architects Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung, who conceived and oversaw the exhibition design, significantly shaped the creative process, together with colleagues such as videographer Peter Kirby. We formed an advisory committee of scholars and experts including McCoy, Reyner Banham, and others whose thinking added immeasurably to the project and its catalogue, designed by Lorraine Wild. Its single most important and memorable feature was Hodgetts and Fung’s thrilling and imaginative exhibition design, including full-scale mockups of two Case Study houses, giving the project an unforgettable presence and setting a standard for future architecture exhibitions at MOCA. The substantial impact of the show and its publication brought the houses back to public attention, helping to usher in a revival of mid-century Modernism in Los Angeles.

From *The New York Times* review by architecture critic Paul Goldberger:

The full-size replicas of the houses are the real knock-’em-dead crowd-pleasers here: You can’t build a whole house in most museums, but here are two of them with room to spare. They are all light, tensile pavilions, houses in which the Southern California dream of inside and outside merging into one are fulfilled ... and they remind us that there was a time when Southern California really did hold out the promise of shaping a new world, its architecture poised to satisfy the dreams of a postwar culture. It was not so much the houses themselves, then, as it was the combination of their serious intent, the heady postwar atmosphere and the increasing sense that Southern California represented America’s future that gave the Case Study program its importance.



Floor plan, *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*, 1989, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





Paul Schimmel joins MOCA as the new chief curator. He previously held positions at the Newport Harbor Art Museum (now the Orange County Museum of Art) and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston.

A major challenge grant by the National Endowment for the Arts provides support for the initiation of First Visit & Beyond, a model education program designed to reach L.A.’s diverse communities. The museum hires artists (instead of educators per se) to lead classes and distribute MOCA-branded materials to libraries, art centers, and schools, followed up by visits to the museum.

MOCA conceives a guide for visiting families. Published in English, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, *Together at MOCA: A Guide for Families* becomes a model publication for other museums.

Jasper Johns’s iconic *Map* (1962) enters MOCA’s permanent collection as a partial gift from Marcia Simon Weisman. It is Weisman’s wish that this painting remain in Los Angeles and in the museum she helped found.

*John Baldessari* is the first full-scale retrospective of this Los Angeles-based artist. His pioneering use of photography, text, and found images has made him one of the most prominent figures in the Conceptual Art movement. Organized by Mary Jane Jacob, the exhibition is overseen—after Jacob’s 1988 departure—by exhibitions coordinator Alma Ruiz with art historian Coosje van Bruggen, author of the accompanying Baldessari book. Van Bruggen collaborates with the artist on the installation. After its MOCA presentation, the retrospective travels to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Musée d’Art Contemporain, Montreal, Canada.

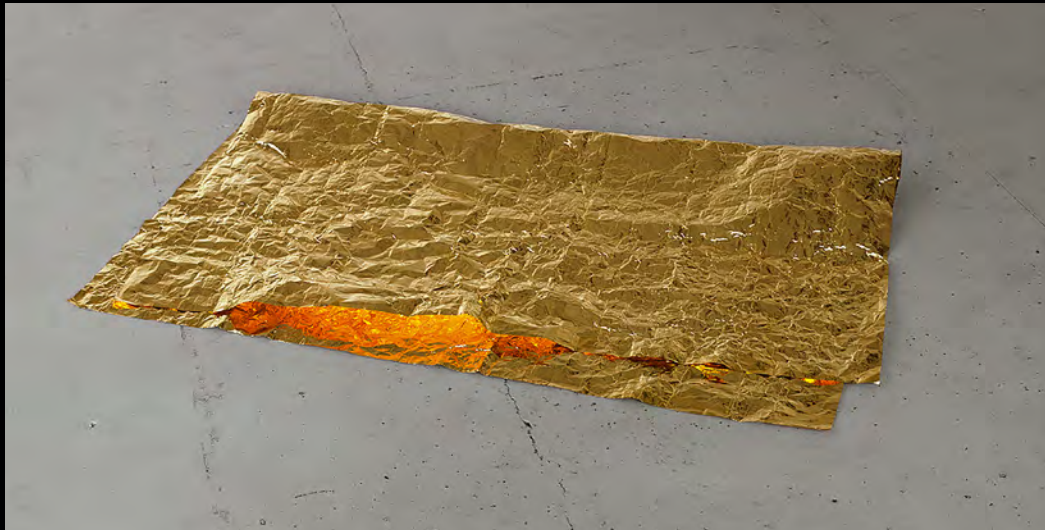
*Roni Horn* is the first major American museum exhibition by the New York-based sculptor. It consists of five installations from 1980-90 that

specifically address the museum spaces in which they are set. The exhibition is organized by assistant curator Ann Goldstein.

Ellen Sebastian writes and directs *Sanctified*, a performance piece based on the life and work of anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston. This condensed and interwoven biographical tribute concentrates on a fictionalized account of the last twenty-four hours of Hurston’s life. In conjunction, a series of commissioned installations by Betye Saar, *Sanctified Visions*, introduces three new mixed-media works tracing Hurston’s life from rural Florida to New York, Jamaica, Haiti, and back to Florida. The installations are organized by groupings of work symbolically related to those places and times. The exhibition and the performance are organized by curator Julie Lazar.

*Barbara Kruger: Untitled (Questions)*, a monumental red, white, and blue mural addressing the “fragile grace of democracy,” is painted on the south wall of The TC. Kruger presents the initial design to the Little Tokyo community, who, after internal discussions and language-content recommendations, supports it. The mural remains on view for two years. The project is organized by assistant curator Ann Goldstein.

*The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* incorporates collaborative and individual works created in the 1950s by a group of young British artists, architects, and critics who re-created several of the Independent Group’s pioneering installations from the exhibitions *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953), *Man, Machine and Motion* (1955), and *This Is Tomorrow* (1956). The organizing committee for the exhibition and catalogue consists of Jacquelynn Baas (director, University Art Museum, Berkeley), Mary Jane Jacob, James Lingwood (adjunct curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, London), David Robbins, Timothy Rub (assistant director, Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, New Hampshire), Elizabeth Smith (associate curator, MOCA), and Graham Whitham. Besides traveling to the organizing museums, the exhibition is also seen at the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM), Centro Julio González, Valencia. The MOCA presentation is organized by associate curator Elizabeth Smith.



Roni Horn, *Gold Field*, 1980/82

Roni Horn (1990) / Ann Goldstein

With the freedom and encouragement to follow our interests, it was very early in my tenure that I first visited Roni’s studio. Having first learned about her work in the pages of *Art in America*, I was compelled by her incisive dialogue with the legacy of Minimal Art of the 1960s. I knew I wanted to work with Roni at that 1985 meeting, and, fortunately, I had the opportunity five years later. Our project was her first major American museum exhibition, and it was also the first solo exhibition I initiated as a curator. It was crucial that Roni’s exhibition accommodate what she has described as a “site dependent” practice, and we worked closely together with John Bowsher to design six successive spaces in The Temporary Contemporary’s Building 5 to accommodate five works from 1980-1990, including one work that occupied two rooms. The floors were painted a very light gray, and, together with natural light from the skylights, it was a particularly luminous space. The exhibition began with one of Roni’s *Aspheres*, a solid steel sphere that subtly deviates from a perfect orb. It concluded with a pair object from 1986, *Things That Happen Again* (installed as *For Two Rooms*), consisting of two identical tapered cylinders of solid milled copper, each positioned so as to reveal its form through the process of walking around it, creating an uncanny experience of repetition.

Among the other works was Roni’s remarkable *Gold Field* (1980/82), a sculpture consisting of an extremely thin sheet of pure gold. Roni used gold for its inherent material properties: weight, malleability, color, and luster. I remember she folded over one end to produce a brilliant, fire-like glow inside the hollow of the gold. Felix Gonzalez-Torres and his partner Ross Laycock were living in L.A. at the time (coincidentally in the same apartment building as my husband and me) and they saw the exhibition, which deeply affected Felix. I remember when Roni and Felix met a few years later in New York, and I witnessed their immediate and profound connection as artists and friends. Felix made “*Untitled*” (*Placebo – Landscape – for Roni*) (1993), a field of gold-wrapped candies, which he included in his MOCA exhibition, *Traveling*, which I organized in 1994. Later, Roni revisited the *Gold Field* as a pair object, making a new work, *Gold Mats, Paired—for Ross and Felix* (1994-95), which is, coincidentally in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I currently work.

Roni Horn on The Temporary Contemporary

Working at The TC was a wonderful opportunity for me. You had that industrial aesthetic and plenty of daylight—you could organize the experience you wanted to offer by designing your own architecture within the architecture. Ann [Goldstein] was a wonderful partner in this project, as was Richard Koshalek. John Bowsher was excellent in realizing my architectural vision within the space. The project got larger as we worked on it and more demanding financially, but I don’t remember that being an impediment. It was a formative thing to work in a way that was so unrestricted, both spatially and socially. It was no nonsense from what I could tell, and that’s not always the case with museums. In fact, at this point, it’s pretty much never the case.

You have this idea of scale being opened up in a way that was unique at that time. I can’t think of any other contemporary space that was available then, and even today there are so few spaces available for contemporary art. In a country the size of the United States it’s absolutely shocking. Almost all my work and exhibitions are in Europe. All of my key works are owned by European collectors and museums. But MOCA was the most satisfying museum-scale show that I did at the time.



Deeply involved with MOCA's education and volunteer programs, trustee Betye Monell Burton creates The Gene & Betye Burton Reading Room at The TC, a wood-paneled library designed by architect Frank Gehry.

The recently donated Jasper Johns *Map* (1982) is shown for the first time in *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Pop Art and Minimalism 1960-1975*. Also included in this exhibition are works by William Anastasi, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Saint Clair Cemin, Mark Innerst, and Robert Longo from the recently gifted Scott D. F. Spiegel Collection. (Early in the year, The Scott Spiegel Memorial Fund/Acquisition is established to acquire works for the museum's permanent collection.) The exhibition is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel.

*Arata Isozaki 1960/1990 Architecture* is the first retrospective of this architect's remarkable career. The exhibition includes documentation of more than thirty projects and buildings designed by Isozaki, the architect of MOCA's 1986 California Plaza building, and the 2019 Pritzker Architecture Prize recipient. Co-organized by Koshalek, the exhibition is timed to coincide with Isozaki's sixtieth birthday, an occasion of particular significance in Japanese culture. It travels to the Centre de Création Industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and the Asahi Shimbun, Tokyo. In addition to these venues, the exhibition is presented at five other museums in Japan. The Los Angeles presentation is coordinated by exhibitions coordinator Alma Ruiz.



Approximately ninety-five works dating from 1938 to 1966 are featured in *Ad Reinhardt*, the artist's first comprehensive exhibition in twenty-three years. The show traces the pictorial development of the artist's oeuvre and its historical relationship to Abstract Expressionism. It is co-organized by Koshalek and William Rubin, director emeritus of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at New York's Museum of Modern Art, with the help of MOCA assistant curator Alma Ruiz and MOMA curatorial assistant Lynn Zelevansky. *Ad Reinhardt* marks the first collaboration between these two museums.

The MOCA California Plaza building by Arata Isozaki is named one of the ten best architectural projects in the United States since 1980 by the American Institute of Architects.

## Ad Reinhardt (1991) / Richard Koshalek

Perhaps no project during my time at MOCA represented a more intensive collaboration for me than our 1991 Ad Reinhardt exhibition, which was on view in the still new Bunker Hill building.

I had always been intrigued by Reinhardt's work, and I wanted to better understand his critical influence on other artists and his impact on every mid-to-late twentieth-century movement from Minimalism to Monochromism and Conceptual Art. In order to achieve this understanding, I realized that I would need to absorb his complete oeuvre, so I decided to approach William Rubin, director emeritus of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, who not only had known Reinhardt, but who had great intellectual integrity as well as historical perspective. He immediately agreed to work with me and assistant curator Alma Ruiz.

At our first meeting, we accepted three conditions recommended by Rubin: 1) that we would go to see every single one of Reinhardt's known works, no matter where they might be; 2) that each work must receive both of our votes to be included in the show; and 3) that I would oversee the installation at MOCA, and that Rubin, with curatorial assistant Lynn Zelevansky, would do the same at MoMA.

The ninety-five paintings, collages, washes, and gouaches ultimately included in the Reinhardt exhibition represented every phase of the artist's career, and made this a thrillingly comprehensive show. It traced Reinhardt's evolution from the 1930s, when he began to explore geometric abstraction, to the 1940s focus on overall patterns, to the 1950s, when he began to challenge the Abstract Expressionists' search for personal mythology. Instead, he moved decisively away from concepts of self-expression, and sought an art removed from worldly dimensions—canvases in different shades of red, then blue, then white, and finally, the all-black paintings of the 1960s for which he remains best known. "The ultimate paintings," he called them, "the last paintings that anyone could paint." For Reinhardt, art had to exist purely as art, with no political or emotional connotations. His reductionist style exerted an incalculable influence on the next generations of artists.

Considering the longstanding reverence for his work, it's astonishing that this was the first major museum retrospective in twenty-three years on Reinhardt; it also marked the first joint project between MoMA and MOCA. Yet the exhibition was not just a long-overdue tribute to a great artist. It underscored MOCA's founding commitment to the value of deep research, to the importance of "doing your homework" in the service of any exhibition of any size that we would present.

The grand proportions of the galleries in the Isozaki building were ideal for Reinhardt's work. When the installation was complete, Rubin suggested only one change. We had hung three of the vertical black paintings on one wall, and in order to make it clear that Reinhardt had not intended them to be a triptych, Rubin proposed that the middle painting be moved three-quarters of an inch to the right. "Who will know?" I asked. "You and I will," he replied.





The Gene J. Burton Acquisitions Endowment is established in honor of Betye Monell Burton's husband, Gene. Given the importance that works on paper have acquired as primary, finished works of art, this acquisitions endowment is positioned to complement past and future gifts to the permanent collection, including a 1956 drawing of Atsuko Tanaka donning her *Electric Dress*, John Cage's fire and watercolors on paper, *River Rocks and Smoke* (1990), and *Untitled* (1961), a pencil-on-paper drawing by Lee Bontecou.

*Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s* presents the work of sixteen visual artists and ten writers whose darkness, extremity, rawness, and political and social confrontation oppose the image of Los Angeles art as being about light, space, color, homogeneity, and hedonism. According to Koshalek, "*Helter Skelter* marks The Museum of Contemporary Art's ongoing commitment to presenting innovative and provocative exhibitions devoted to the art of Southern California." The exhibition is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel and coordinated by exhibitions coordinator Alma Ruiz.

The TC temporarily closes in June to allow for the development of the surrounding property by First Street Plaza. The agreement between First Street Plaza and MOCA stipulates that "The TC reopen and be fully accessible to the public no later than the summer of 1994." However, due to delays and the subsequent cancellation of the First Street Plaza project, The TC remains closed until the fall of 1995.

*Selections from the Marcia Simon Weisman Collection*, a tribute to one of the city's leading art patrons and a founding trustee of MOCA, highlights works from her collection, including gifts to MOCA, ranging from the years 1912 to 1989. The exhibition is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel.



Selections from the Marcia Simon Weisman Collection, 1992, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

MOCA launches the *Focus Series*, one-person exhibitions by historical and contemporary artists, including MOCA-commissioned works. Between 1992 and 1999, the museum organizes thirty exhibitions by artists hailing from the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Asia, among them Uta Barth, Dove Bradshaw, Judy Fiskin, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Margaret Honda, Kcho, Toba Khedoori, Yves Klein, Hirokazu Kosaka, Wolfgang Laib, Sherrie Levine, Piero Manzoni, Jorge Pardo, Kiki Smith, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and Richard Wilson.

As part of *Focus Series*, MOCA presents *Judy Fiskin: Some Photographs, 1973-1992*, a selected survey of forty-seven photographs by this Los Angeles-based artist, which examines the aesthetic decisions behind vernacular architecture, popular culture, and art. The exhibition is organized by associate curator Ann Goldstein.

*Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition* examines New York School painting and Pop Art from a variety of viewpoints. It comprises one hundred sixty works by twenty-one artists, featuring masterpieces and lesser-known works by, among others, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, James Rosenquist, Edward Ruscha, and Andy Warhol. Many works from the Panza Collection are included and serve as a foundation for seeing the newer pieces. The exhibition travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. It is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel and MOCA's 1992 Ahmanson curatorial fellow Donna De Salvo, who is also Robert Lehman Curator at the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton.

Helter Skelter (1992) / Amy Gerstler and Benjamin Weissman

The *Helter Skelter* show seemed like a big deal at the time. The opening was HUGE, lavish, very crowded. The idea that writers as well as artists were included in the catalogue, were considered participants in the show, was thrilling, and there was a reading associated with the show that further highlighted the contributions of the writers. Many of the pieces in the exhibition were big, splashy, intense. There was a feeling that it was one of the hippest, coolest things to hit L.A. ever—transgressive, exciting. Lots of booze, etc. For rising art stars like Liz Larner and Jim Shaw, for example, it pushed their careers to another level. It catapulted established artists like Paul McCarthy into super stardom. The show was Paul Schimmel's brainchild. The catalogue was edited by Catherine Gudis, who welcomed a literary component into the catalogue, asking a group of writers not to write about the pieces in the show, not to write art criticism or commentary, but rather to submit storytelling and/or poetry that shared an aesthetic with the visual works being exhibited. That was unusual then, and still is. There were theory and history essays by Lane Relyea and Norman Klein. The subtitle of the show was *L.A. Art in the 1990s*, and it was lovely that the catalogue also presented a small sample of Los Angeles literary writing of the 1990s. A few years later, the Viennese gallerist Ursula Krinzinger curated an ambitious show in Austria, including about a quarter of the artists who had participated in the *Helter Skelter* show, importing them to Europe. Because of the enormous amount of publicity the *Helter Skelter* show received, it boosted the careers of everyone who participated in it. Benjamin Weissman was the only person to participate in the show both as a visual artist and a literary writer in that he had fiction published in the catalogue and collaborated with Jim Shaw on a text/image comic strip comprised of sixty-four paintings, titled *Horror Vacui*.



Manuel Ocampo, in *Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s*, 1992, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



After fourteen years at MOCA, associate director Sherri Geldin becomes director of the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio. Geldin was MOCA's first employee and a member of the Mayor's Advisory Committee tasked with initial fundraising. She led the search for the buildings that became known as The Temporary Contemporary, now MOCA Geffen. Geldin and Koshalek worked in tandem during the museum's growing years.

A member of the Artists Advisory Council, the Architecture Committee, and the second artist to join the Board of Trustees, Sam Francis continues to play a pivotal role in the founding and development of MOCA. Francis and the Sam Francis Art Museum Inc. generously donate to the museum's permanent collection four paintings and three gouaches dating from 1951 to 1967 that exemplify his various styles. An eighth work, a 1978 painting, is given on behalf of the artist and The Litho Shop, Inc. This group of works is the second largest single gift to MOCA from an artist in the museum's history.

*Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* examines the entire body of work by renowned American architect Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974) through drawings, sketches, scale models, paintings, archival and newly commissioned photographs, artifacts, and an in-depth analysis by

distinguished scholars and architects. The installation design is by Arata Isozaki. The retrospective underscores MOCA's continued commitment to the investigation of pivotal ideas and practices that have constituted the field of architecture since the mid-century. The exhibition opens at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in recognition of Kahn's life-long connection to that city, continuing to Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, Gunma, Japan; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas; and the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. The exhibition is organized by Koshalek, associate director Sherri Geldin, and curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith.

*Focus Series: Lee Bontecou: Sculpture and Drawings of the 1960s* is an examination of the work of this overlooked American artist. The exhibition includes eleven sculptures and fourteen drawings and is responsible for shedding new light on her career. After MOCA it travels to the Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. The exhibition is organized by curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith.

*Focus Series: Renée Green's World Tour* is a four-part installation that incorporates sculpture, sound, photography, video, and other media to trace the artist's recent journeys. The exhibition is organized by curator Julie Lazar.

*Robert Irwin* is the first full-scale survey of Irwin's wide-ranging career in Southern California. It includes thirty-five paintings and sculptures from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, two new works created in the spirit of works of the 1970s, and a specially commissioned installation representing his interest in site-determined environmental work. Irwin is a pivotal figure in the history of MOCA as a key member of the Artists Advisory Council, the first artist to join the Board of Trustees, a supporter of the decision to bring Koshalek to the museum in 1980, and a member of the Architecture Committee that selected Isozaki for the California Plaza building. After its presentation in Los Angeles, Irwin's retrospective travels to the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. The exhibition is organized by Koshalek and curator Kerry Brougher.

One of the final projects from multidisciplinary artist John Cage (1912-1992), *Rolywholyover A Circus* contains a selection of works by many artists important to Cage, interactive computer installations and relevant ephemera subject to the manipulations of a chance-generated score, as well as a program of live and pre-recorded performances, film and video screenings, and readings. The contents of the exhibition change daily according to chance operations devised by Cage. Different at every stop in the tour, it travels to The Menil Collection, Houston; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Center, Tokyo; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The exhibition is organized by curator Julie Lazar.

*Recent Acquisitions in the Permanent Collection* features *Double Lock* (1991) by Fred Fehlau; *Cigar* (1991), *Untitled* (1992), and *Prison Window* (1992) by Robert Gober; and *Salire* (1986) by Gerhard Merz. This section is organized by exhibitions coordinator Alma Ruiz. It is also the first showing of works by Sam Francis gifted to the museum by the artist. The Francis gift is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel.



Installation view of *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1991



*Robert Irwin*, 1993, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





Renée Green's *World Tour*, 1993, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
Installation view of John Cage, *Rolywholyover* A Circus, at The Menil Collection, 1994

**Lee Bontecou: Sculpture and Drawings of the 1960s (1993) / Elizabeth A. T. Smith**

The impetus for this exhibition came from repeated sightings of Lee Bontecou's sculpture at museums throughout the U.S. when I was traveling for other research. The power and force of her welded metal and canvas sculptures made a strong impact and I resolved to learn more about this artist, with whom I was only superficially familiar at the time. Research revealed that she had been one of the best-known and highly regarded young artists of the 1960s, that she continued to show her work into the mid-1970s, and then had inexplicably ceased to be a visible presence on the scene. After numerous attempts to locate and communicate with the artist, all of which failed to produce a response, I decided to proceed with a small exhibition with loans from public and private collections. I selected a group of sculptures and works on paper from the 1960s that to my eye were the strongest, most representative, and with the greatest variety of form in her work. As the show took shape, I continued to write to Bontecou sharing my progress, posing questions, and asking for feedback on the text I had written for a brochure to accompany the show, yet she never answered. One day, to my immense surprise, I received a phone call from her, as she wanted to point out an error I had made in the manuscript I'd sent. From that point on, we developed a dialogue, which led eventually to my curation of a large retrospective of Bontecou's work years later at another institution. Yet it was this small exhibition that reintroduced Bontecou's work of the 1960s to a new generation of artists, curators, and collectors who found her work compelling, laying the groundwork for the subsequent presentations of and scholarship on her work that followed.



Lee Bontecou: *Sculpture and Drawings of the 1960s*, 1993, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



MOCA receives an outright gift of seventy works of painting and sculpture created between 1982 and 1993 from international collectors Count Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo. The gift includes works by Los Angeles artists Lawrence Carroll, Greg Colson, Jeff Colson, Ron Griffin, Mark Lere, Gregory Mahoney, Ross Rudel, Peter Shelton, Robert Therrien, and Roy Thurston. The museum initiates the planning of an exhibition and a publication that will bring together this new gift with the eighty historically significant works from the Panza Collection purchased by MOCA in 1984.

MOCA's Project Council begins a celebratory fundraising luncheon honoring visionary leaders in the visual arts, dance, music, and literature. The first year's honoree of the Distinguished Women in the Arts Award is collector and trustee Beatrice Gersh. Since then the museum has celebrated editor Tina Brown (1997), choreographer Twyla Tharp (1999), actress and director Anjelica Huston and artist Barbara Kruger (2001), artist Yoko Ono (2003), artist Jenny Holzer (2010), photographer Annie Leibovitz (2012), artists Lita Albuquerque, Helen Pashgian, Nancy Rubins, and Betye Saar (2013), trustee Susan Gersh and artist Marilyn Minter (2015), life trustee Lillian Lovelace and artist Tala Madani (2017), and life trustee Betye Monell Burton, trustee Dallas Price-Van Breda, and artists Laura Owens and Mary Weatherford (2019).



The Museum of Contemporary Art staff, 1994

*Focus Series: Felix Gonzalez-Torres* showcases this New York-based artist's provocative, minimal works utilizing various media, including works on paper, sculpture, photography, and billboards. It is the first major museum show of his work and is jointly organized by curator Ann Goldstein, MOCA; associate curator Amada Cruz, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; and director Susanne Getz, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. It consists of three distinct exhibitions, each conceived explicitly for the respective venues by the artist.

*Focus Series: Alternating 1 to 100 and vice versa* is Italian artist Alighiero e Boetti's first one-person exhibition in Los Angeles. Questioning the notion of individuality and the role of the artist, Boetti, in collaboration with the Le Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble in France, creates fifty red boxes, each containing one of fifty weaving patterns done in 1992 by students from French fine art schools and friends of the artist, one hundred kilims woven by Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan, and ten drawings on canvas. The MOCA exhibition presents a selection of the red boxes, twenty-eight kilims and corresponding patterns, and ten drawings; it is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz.

Associate director of education Kim Kanatani succeeds Vas Prabhu to become MOCA's second director of education. She remains in this position until 2000.

*Rolywholyover* A *Circus* receives the International Association of Art Critics Award for Best Museum Show, 1994.

Uncertainty concerning the feasibility of the First Street Plaza development project in Little Tokyo prompts MOCA to reopen The TC in the fall, after a three-year closure.

*Los Angeles Times* publisher David Laventhol, who served as board chair from 1993 to 1997, co-chairs with trustee Audrey Irmas the \$25 million endowment campaign (Capital Campaign III), which leads to a generous gift from David Geffen to rename The Temporary Contemporary as MOCA at The Geffen Contemporary (later shortened to MOCA Geffen). The campaign goal is achieved with the assistance of a diverse group of supporters, which include private donors, corporations, foundations, and MOCA trustees.

MOCA acquires the Freidus/Shapiro Photography Collection, renamed The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Photography Collection. Its in-depth approach and international significance add to the photography initiative begun with the acceptance of the Max Yavno Collection and Fund in 1989. The museum's objective is to motivate donations of photography and photo-based works to augment MOCA's photographic holding, equivalent to what the Marcia Simon Weisman bequest has accomplished for works on paper.

MOCA pioneers the adoption of a long-term effort to establish cultural ties with Latin American countries. The Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program proposes to initiate far-reaching artistic discourse with institutions and artists in Mexico and in Central and South America by focusing on three areas: research on Latin American art and artists, information dissemination in the form of a series of annual publications and a culminating symposium, and exhibition programming and permanent-collection acquisition. Given its artistic mission and location in one of the country's most diverse metropolitan areas and a place where the Latin American presence has been strongly felt for hundreds of years, MOCA takes the lead among U.S. museums in developing a long-lasting contemporary art research and exhibition program on Latin American art, thus contributing to a greater cross-cultural understanding that benefits audiences of adults and children alike in new and meaningful ways. The Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program is headed by assistant curator Alma Ruiz.

*Racing Towards the Millennium: Literature Without Borders* celebrates the end of the second millennium with a series that explores the diversity of literary artists and perspectives in the western United States from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. Spanning 1995 to 1999 under such themes as *Voices from the American West* and *Literature Without Borders*, the series features writers Octavia E. Butler, Gretel Ehrlich, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Alma Guillermoprieto, Donald Hall, Ursula K. Le Guin, Philip Levine, Barry Lopez, Lorrie

Moore, Richard Rodriguez, and Abraham Verghese, among others. This is the first collaborative program between the Los Angeles Central Library and MOCA. It is organized by MOCA's development director Erica Clark and the Library Foundation of L.A.'s Cultural Programs director Louise Steinman.

A key component of the series is a creative-writing masterclass offered each year to about thirty students, selected by their English teachers, from two L.A.-area high schools (Oakwood School on the west side of Los Angeles, and Roosevelt High School in East L.A.). Participants attend intimate sessions with Guillermoprieto, Le Guin, Butler, Lopez, Rodriguez, Terry Tempest Williams, N. Scott Momaday, Carolyn See, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Wanda Coleman, among other distinguished writers. The workshops are facilitated by poet Peter Levitt.

After its conclusion, Louise Steinman adapts *Racing Towards the Millennium* into the acclaimed ALOUD series at the Central Library.

As part of *Focus Series*, MOCA presents *Piero Manzoni: Line Drawings*, a series of thirteen rarely shown "line" drawings created during 1959 and 1960 along with *Line 8.17m* (1959) and *Line 7,200m* (1960), the largest line in the world. The exhibition is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz; it travels to Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome.

*Cy Twombly: A Retrospective* comprises approximately one hundred paintings, works on paper, and sculptures and surveys the complete range of Twombly's work, including little-known early works from the 1950s as well as key pieces, some from European private collections, previously seen only in Europe. The retrospective is organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

*1965-1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art* is the first major historical overview of Conceptual Art presented in the United States. The exhibition explores one of the most influential periods in the development of contemporary art when an increasing number of artists began to question the form, function, and meaning of a work of art. Fifty-five artists from the United States, Canada, and Europe show work that, although created in many different media and with widely varying intentions, has in common a challenge to fundamental premises about the object and objective of art. The exhibition is organized by curator Ann Goldstein and the 1995 Ahmanson curatorial fellow Anne Rorimer.

*Sigmar Polke Photoworks: When Pictures Vanish*, a comprehensive retrospective of the artist's photography-based works, examines the critical role that photography plays in his larger oeuvre. The exhibition consists of approximately one hundred twenty pieces from the mid-1960s to the present, including the key series *Paris*, *Afghanistan*, *Pakistan*, and *Goya "Die Alten."* The exhibition travels to Site Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel.



One unexpected gift of my long tenure at MOCA was the opportunity and support to conceive projects that had a relationship to one another over the course of time, including exhibitions that drove the development of other exhibitions. This was particularly the case with the three major survey exhibitions I was fortunate to organize either as a sole or co-curator, including 1965-1975: *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, which considered the history of the foundations of Conceptual Art, and which grew out of *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, which considered a subsequent generation of American artists addressing how representations and cultural signs function and how meaning is made. *Reconsidering* turned out to be a “prequel” to *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968* (2004), which subsequently examined the foundations of Minimal Art in the United States. For *Reconsidering*, I seized the opportunity to collaborate with Anne Rorimer, former associate curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, whose work I had long admired, and who had contributed a text on the subject of Conceptual Art for the catalogue accompanying *A Forest of Signs*. Anne and I sought to examine this late modernist movement, which was at the foundation of the work of subsequent generations of artists, but we pointedly did not want to be beholden to defining the term Conceptual Art. Instead we aimed to consider a range of practices that questioned the form, function, meaning, and display of a work of art. Each of the fifty-six artists was represented by a specific project or body of work that we selected together with the artists. Though an historic exhibition, thankfully most of the artists were still alive at the time and present to oversee the installation of their works. In many cases earlier works were revisited, adapted, or otherwise made manifest by the artists for the exhibition, including works by Giovanni Anselmo, Michael Asher, Mel Bochner, Daniel Buren, Morgan Fisher, Joan Jonas, John Knight, Christine Kozlov, N.E. Thing Co., Maria Nordman, Ed Ruscha, Niele Toroni, and Lawrence Weiner. In the case of Hans Haacke, upon discovering that Philip Morris was one of the funders of the reopening of The Temporary Contemporary, where the exhibition took place, he reached out to me to express his strong concern. In lieu of withdrawing he offered to post a petition on the wall next to his work, which he invited the other artists to sign. A month later, Adrian Piper withdrew her work from the exhibition altogether. The exhibition explored a pivotal period that challenged the definitions and authority of art—at a time when all authority was called into question. Meaning was no longer fully contained within the object, a frame, or even solely within the time of a work’s conception, but rather, was contingent upon its specific display within the context of an exhibition—positioned within the present and porous to the world.

Five years after the passing of Marcia Simon Weisman, her drawing collection comes to MOCA as Bequest of Marcia Simon Weisman. Consisting of eighty-three works on paper, this stellar collection includes works by seminal artists Jean-Michel Basquiat, Richard Diebenkorn, Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Agnes Martin, Barnett Newman, Sam Francis, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock, among others. One of the founders of MOCA and a dedicated trustee, Marcia Simon Weisman favored the museum throughout its short existence with various donations of significant works. In addition to the works-on-paper collection, Weisman previously donated Jasper Johns’s iconic *Map* (1962), Sam Francis’s pivotal *Blue Balls VIII* (1961-1962), Robert Rauschenberg’s *XXXIV Drawings for Dante’s Inferno* (1959-1960), and Barnett Newman’s *18 Cantos* (1963-1964). As part of the gift, the Marcia S. Weisman Foundation donates funds to establish a study center for works on paper and to appoint a curator to oversee the collection.

In an attempt to restart the Walt Disney Concert Hall (which will be home to the L.A. Philharmonic) after a two-year impasse, Koshalek organizes the *Walt Disney Concert Hall: A Celebration of Music and Architecture* at the request of Diane Disney Miller. To acquaint the public with this civic project, the exhibition is staged outdoors, on MOCA’s plaza. It runs for five months and serves as a catalyst for meeting the June 1, 1997, fundraising deadline set by Los Angeles County to move the project forward.

The USC Architectural Guild honors Koshalek with the Parkinson Spirit of Urbanism Award for his leadership in the creation of MOCA as an urban cultural center and his commitment to architecture as an integral aspect of MOCA’s exhibition program.

MOCA launches its website [www.moca.org](http://www.moca.org).

*Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945* is the first major exhibition in the U.S. to focus on the dynamic relationship between cinema and the visual arts. Works by more than ninety of the postwar period’s most remarkable

filmmakers and visual artists are included along with approximately 175 art objects, 60 films and film excerpts, and 15 installations. The exhibition is accompanied by a film series jointly organized by MOCA and the UCLA Film and Television Archive; it travels to the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Italy; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. The exhibition is organized by curator Kerry Brougher.

*Ed Moses: A Retrospective of the Paintings and Drawings, 1951-1996* is the first full-scale retrospective of this Southern California artist. The exhibition presents sixty paintings and drawings spanning his career and focuses on several related yet distinct bodies of work within his diverse oeuvre that underscore the importance and vitality of the artist’s achievements and the museum’s ongoing commitment to the art of Southern California. The exhibition is organized by New York-based poet, art critic, and curator John Yau. MOCA’s assistant curator Alma Ruiz is the project director.

On the occasion of the Ed Moses retrospective, the artist, family members, and friends donate six works on paper and five paintings ranging from 1958 to 1996. This gift signals the continuation of a relationship formed early on between the museum and local artists, bringing generous donations to the museum by Sam Francis and the Estate of Max Yavno.

*Focus Series: Cicatriz* marks the first exhibition under the auspices of the Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program. This site-specific installation by Brazilian artist Rosângela Rennó continues her exploration of social amnesia. It combines eighteen photographs of jailhouse tattoos with twelve texts from various English, Spanish, and Portuguese language newspapers, with both images and texts inserted into, rather than on, the surface of the walls. The exhibition is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz.





Several issues inspired me to organize a major exhibition exploring the interactions of the visual arts and cinema. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, artists increasingly turned to film and video as a medium, substantially incorporating cinematic imagery into painting and photography. With the centennial of film approaching and MOCA a new museum in the movie-making capital, it seemed fitting, even necessary, that MOCA examine the mostly unexplored territory between contemporary art and cinema.

Because the interactions between art and film are complex, it was necessary to find a cohesive through-line as an organizing principle. I settled on the theme of the dismantling of cinema, which appeared first in postwar feature filmmaking in movies such as *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). By taking this approach, the exhibition could include not only artists and experimental filmmakers who were investigating the physical cinematic apparatus but mainstream motion-picture directors who looked at the inner workings of their industry. By taking cinema apart and understanding how it worked, it became apparent why film was such a dominant force in both reflecting and shaping culture.

*Hall of Mirrors* was perhaps the first major museum exhibition to embrace mainstream cinema as an art form, and its catalogue has been used in university courses. Since its premiere in early 1996, artists have turned even more to film and cinematic effects, with many now utilizing professional motion-picture techniques. The show was at the forefront of a wave of exhibitions investigating cinema that continues to today, and the line between art and film has become ever more blurred.



Hall of Mirrors opening, 1996, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Front Row:  
Peter Kirby, Judith Barry,  
Sharon Lockhart, Cindy Bernard,  
Douglas Gordon, Raul Ruiz,  
Peter Kubelka, Carolee Schneemann,  
Kerry Brougher

Second Row:  
Allen Ruppersberg, Douglas Blau,  
Stan Douglas, Craig Hodgetts,  
[friend of Fabio Mauri], Ming Fung,  
Fabio Mauri

Third Row:  
John Baldessari, Richard Koshalek,  
Barbara Kruger, Stacia Payne,  
[Unknown]

MOCA receives 105 works by fifty-three artists from the Lannan Foundation's art collection. Assembled by J. Patrick Lannan and J. Patrick Lannan Jr., the collection is dispersed among MOCA, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Tailored to suit MOCA's mission, the gift contains pivotal work by Southern California artists with which the museum has had an extensive history, including *Big Wheel* (1979) by Chris Burden, two translucent discs and five early paintings by Robert Irwin, several works by Charles Ray including *Tabletop* (1989), and fourteen collages and mixed-media objects by Wallace Berman. It also bolsters the representation of artists already in the museum's permanent collection, including John M. Miller, Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw, and Kiki Smith. It brings first pieces by Siah Armajani and Jay DeFeo. The Lannan Foundation gift allows MOCA to continue collecting individual artists in-depth, a philosophy established with the Panza Collection acquisition in 1984.

*Uncommon Sense* is a program of newly commissioned individual projects, collaborative works, performance, and education activities by six artists and one artist collaborative. The exhibition investigates how the unique perspective, strategies, and techniques of these artists reach new audiences within and outside the museum walls. *Uncommon Sense* includes six diverse projects by Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom, Mel Chin and the GALA Committee, Cornerstone Theater Company, Karen Finley, Rick Lowe, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles—all committed to engaging public interaction in unusual, innovative ways. The exhibition is organized by curator Julie Lazar and the 1997 Ahmanson curatorial fellow Tom Finkelpearl.

Robert Gober is the artist's first solo museum show in the United States in four years. Gober's site-specific installation is composed of distinct sculpture elements that evoke collective and personal memories of the home, the urban environment, ecology, Catholicism, procreation, and sexuality. A sculpture of the Virgin Mary with a culvert pipe piercing her midsection draws protests from many Catholics who see it as a sign of disrespect. Addressing their concerns, Koshalek is able to engage the protesters while explaining the concept of freedom of expression. The exhibition is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel.

*Jeff Wall*, a comprehensive survey of the Canadian artist, links the narrative traditions of tableau painting and "directorial mode" of photography. Comprising thirty-four of the artist's works, including a new series, this is Wall's first retrospective as well as the largest exhibition of his works to date. The exhibition travels to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., and the Art Tower Mito Japan, and is organized by curator Kerry Brougher.

*A Lasting Legacy: Selections from the Lannan Foundation Gift* presents an in-depth selection of works recently given by the Lannan Foundation. Organized both monographically and thematically, it includes major individual pieces or bodies of work by John Altoon, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Wallace Berman, Chris Burden, Vija Celmins, Jay DeFeo, Mark di Suvero, Tom Friedman, Robert Irwin, Alfred Jensen, Mike Kelley, Jeff Koons, Sol LeWitt, John McLaughlin, Malcolm Morley,

Charles Ray, Jim Shaw, and Kiki Smith, among others. The exhibition is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel and curator Ann Goldstein.

*Cindy Sherman: Retrospective* traces Sherman's photographic work and her artistic development from the mid-1970s through the present. Totaling 156 works, it presents in-depth selections from each of her key series: *Untitled Film Stills*, *Centerfolds*, *Fashion*, *Fairy Tales*, *Disasters*, *History Portraits*, *Sex Pictures*, as well as her most recent investigations, which are inspired by Surrealist photography and horror films. The exhibition is co-organized by MOCA curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith and curator Amada Cruz, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. In addition to the two organizing institutions, the exhibition travels to Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague; CAPC, musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

*Focus Series: Catherine Opie* introduces two bodies of work that explore the urban architecture and infrastructure of Los Angeles. They are the *Freeways* series, forty black-and-white images that have never been shown in their entirety in Los Angeles, and five new photographs of strip-mall buildings along the commercial streets of Los Angeles in neighborhoods undergoing demographic transitions. Opie is the winner of the first Emerging Artist Award created by MOCA and The Citibank Private Bank. The exhibition is organized by curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith.

*Focus Series: Todo Cambia* is a commissioned installation by the Cuban artist Kcho (Alexis Leyva Machado). The large-scale installation (the title of which translates as "Everything Changes") has two components: a grouping of sculptures, including a barrel, a raft, an oar, a kayak, a surfboard, and a small boat resting on tables formerly used in studio art classes at the Superior Institute of the Arts in Havana, and a room-size vessel constructed from free-standing bookshelves found in open-air book markets throughout Havana, their shelves filled by the types of books that Cuban citizens are allowed to read. The exhibition is part of the Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program. It is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz.

The Marcia Simon Weisman Center for Works on Paper (later changed to The Marcia Simon Weisman Works on Paper Study Center) opens, and a research area is set up for art professionals desiring to research and study MOCA's works-on-paper collection. The Center is headed by assistant curator Cornelia H. Butler.



MOCA received funds from The Citibank Private Bank to establish an Emerging Artist Award, and I was given oversight of the project in 1997, the first of a three-year series of awards. Nominations were sought from colleagues in the community—artists, academics, and collectors such as Anne Ayers, Judy Fiskin, David Joselit, and Dean Valentine—to identify promising young artists in Southern California who had not yet had a museum exhibition. My co-curator Colette Dartnall and I had the pleasure and privilege of making studio visits as part of the selection process. Among the young artists of Los Angeles at the time, the work of Catherine Opie stood out for its originality and vision. While her portraits and self-portraits had become well known, having already been shown in New York and included in the Whitney Biennial, she had been making a body of lesser-known work that, like her images of individuals, was about the specificity of identity and the structure of community. Her *Freeways* and *Mini-Malls* series centered on the vernacular and infrastructural spaces of the Los Angeles urban landscape, powerful in their evocation of the city’s identity. Opie was awarded the first Citibank Prize with an exhibition of these two bodies of work—her first solo museum show. For MOCA it was one of a number of what would become the first exhibitions of work by artists from the region who would later become well known.



Catherine Opie, *Untitled*, 1994, in *Catherine Opie*, 1997, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

The Jeff Wall survey was the result of my interest in history painting and the growing use of the cinematic in photography. Several emerging artists in the 1980s and 1990s were creating images that were influenced by movies and film stills. Wall’s work went further, not only using actors and sets in a *tableau vivant* approach, but also digital effects, widescreen formats, and illumination behind large color transparencies. MOCA was already investigating crossovers with cinema in exhibitions like *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945*, and was itself a museum based in the motion-picture capital; therefore, organizing a survey of Wall, who believed that photography grew out of a desire for cinematography, seemed an appropriate undertaking.

Although Wall was a recognized figure in his native Canada and Europe, he had not yet had a substantial show in the States. While MOCA was by then already celebrated for its well-researched thematic exhibitions and major artist retrospectives, a full survey show for a then-emerging foreign artist was unusual and opened the museum up to an additional direction. It was also one of the first surveys in the States given to a member of a new group of international photographers who were treating photography as painting. The MOCA show, also seen on the cinematic curved walls of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C, established the artist as an internationally renowned figure, a reputation that has only grown since.



Installation view of *Jeff Wall*, at Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., 1997



My memory is Paul Schimmel wanted to do a retrospective, which I had never done, and I didn't feel it was appropriate. I had no interest, basically. I felt like I was too young and I didn't want to spend all that time that it takes to organize a retrospective. I was feeling very creative and I wanted to make new work. And the retrospective would have happened in the Isozaki building, and I didn't have any feeling for the Isozaki building, at least back then—where it was located and the feel of the rooms didn't appeal to me. But The Temporary Contemporary did.

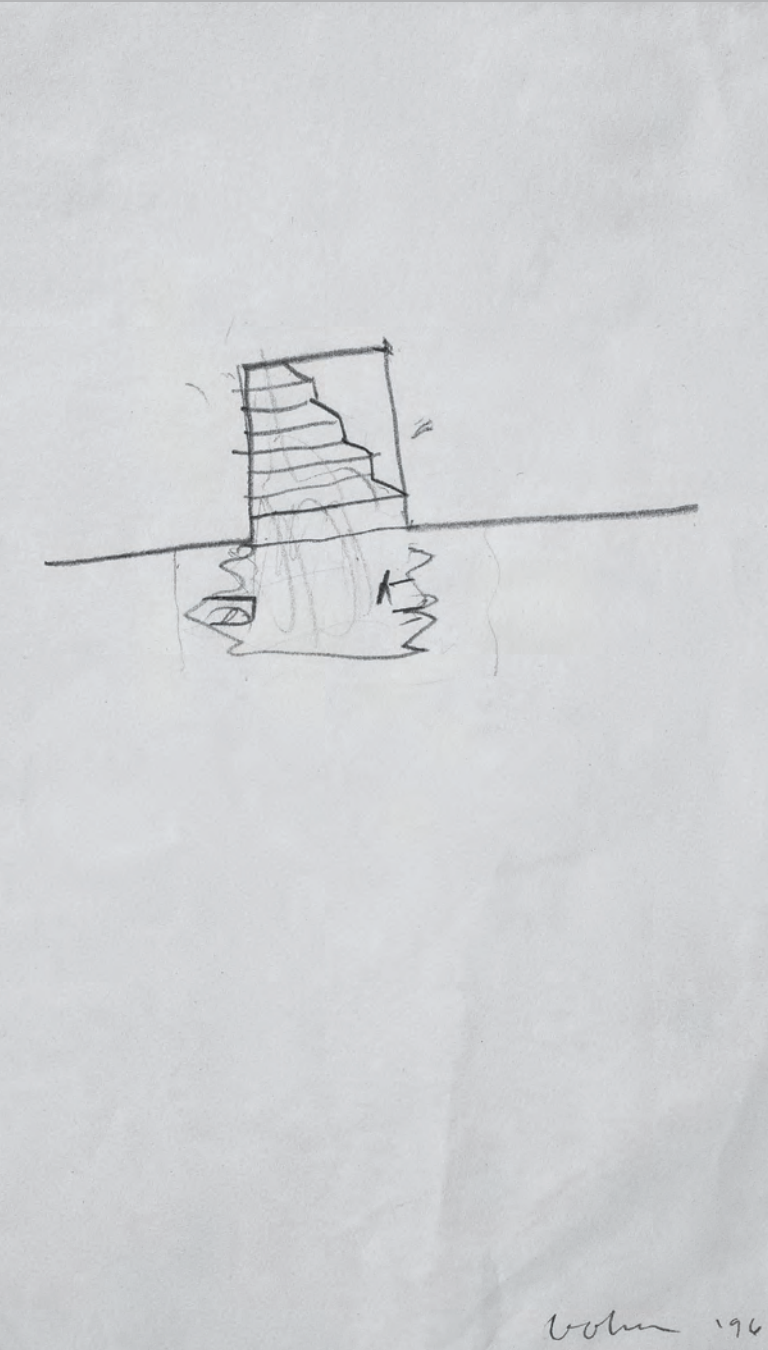
So, The TC appealed to me for its history, number one, its location, its original architecture, and then for the very minimal, delicate, sensitive stuff that Frank Gehry did inside it to make it into an art-habitable place. There was something indescribable about it, a feeling that you get when you're in the space, and I very much liked stepping into that history. Because it was very open I felt like I could go in any direction in that space, and I mean that in a conceptual way and in a practical way—going in any direction—because of relatively unlimited constraints of height and making a mess. I was hoping it would free me up. That really, really appealed to me.

I think it was there that L.A. was a home to artists. It wasn't a launching pad to New York. I knew great artists who were living there, my age and younger. That was my perceived audience and so that's why I wanted to do a new project there. The project grew slowly and painfully. It was the only time that I had to postpone a museum show and I felt terrible, but I was in a complete jam conceptually because I could not resolve the piece. And I know what a pain in the ass it is to bring that to a museum, because there's a show before, there's a show afterwards, there's shipping, there's insurance. It creates a whole chain reaction of problems for a museum. But Paul had faith in me and they figured it out and they accommodated me and it worked out. You don't know how to solve conceptual problems sometimes and it just takes time and blind faith in the project.

The TC afforded me the ability to go below the floor. The work existed on two levels. There was the cement exhibition floor and then we were able to go down into the floor and create what looked like subterranean tidal pools. This was my conceptual conundrum. I knew I had to go down; I wanted to go down. I didn't know why and I didn't know what was down there. I thought, well, of course it's dark if you go down into a floor; it's dark. But it wasn't right and I didn't know how to resolve it and it wasn't until Don [Moffett] and I were on vacation up in Maine, and we had driven across New England and we had—we don't fight much, but we had fought like we never fought on this drive across New England—and when we got to Maine I was standing in this gorgeous sunlit tidal pool up to my ankles in water and I was furious (laughs). And I looked down and I was standing in one of the most beautiful God-given environments, you know? This gorgeous clear water, all this sea life all around me, and through all of this I realized, well, that's really what's down below. It's not darkness; it's day lightness. And so, then I was on the path to try to figure it out. How do you make a sculpture if a day is a tidal pool? And we figured it out and we did it and this goes straight to the heart of what was The Temporary Contemporary. John Bowsher was head of installation and I think he really hated this project, because it was really difficult. And everyone said, "Oh, John's really great. Don't worry about it, John will take care of it." John was, let's say, imperfect in the realization of it in that he didn't really get—he'd gone into the floor before, and I think you guys now have that amazing Chris Burden piece. And that history of the Geffen was on my mind and that piece in particular really spoke to me and then I knew I was going down again. To make a long story short, John made a financial assessment of what this would cost without getting quotes, and when we went to do it, it was much more expensive than anybody had realized. And that was a problem because it's tied to my name. It's like, the Gober show is over budget.

But we all got it done. It was a massive effort digging up the floor and then putting it back afterwards for Paul's next exhibition. What other institution would have thought this was a good idea to do? Because in my experience with museums—because I've gone into the floor in a number of museums, but it's usually a very limited installation. Like, it's maybe two by four feet to make a hole in the museum and you go down. But in my experience it's really all about attitude; it's not about physical possibility, because you can always work it out some way. But you have to have the person who's on the top, who's making decisions—and that was Richard and Paul—who think this is a good idea, who think this is interesting, who think it's worthwhile. And then, it can be figured out. Because I go into some places, they want to show a piece and you tell them what's involved and you get, "Oh, no, that's a, no, we can't do that." And I understand because it's always money with institutions—money and time, you know? They're looking at this messy unknown and water. You know, water in a traditional museum is, uh, you don't put water over masterpieces, you know?

So it takes the mechanicals person, it takes the building's architect, it takes a plumber, it takes whoever is downstairs—in one instance it was a bookshop. You know, it's a lot to figure out, but you can do it. You've created a kind of magical moment in a place that didn't have one, or didn't have something like that, a surprise like that. So, hats off to MOCA at that time. You guys were so adventuresome and willing, and I think it was extraordinarily successful.





In 1995, Julie Lazar invited me to co-curate a show with her at The Temporary Contemporary. After some twists and turns, *Uncommon Sense* was the result—a museum-scale experiment in the yet unnamed genre of interactive, collective “Social Practice” art. Since we had worked together at the Hudson River Museum in the early 1980s, I knew that Julie Lazar and Richard Koshalek were, in their hearts, champions of artists. Still, what happened was extraordinary.

Imagine a show that included a full-scale barrel-racing corral with rodeo-inspired performances on a trotting horse (Ann Carlson and Mary Ellen Strom), a metro bus that became a stage for specially written plays by community partners (Cornerstone Theater), a classroom/gallery where you could draw a nude model (Karen Finley), a massive bicoastal collaboration that wove artworks into the actual sets of the TV show *Melrose Place* (GALA Committee), a wooden “shotgun” house in the galleries that was a spring-board for long-term collaborative project across town in Watts (Rick Lowe), and a setting for public conversation that included a cobalt-blue glass “peace table” hung from the ceiling amid over 1,000,000 pounds of crushed glass (Mierle Laderman Ukeles).

The catalogue, edited by Russell Ferguson, described the complexity of it all. Along with essays by me and Julie, cultural critic Marita Sturken tracked the projects as they were being imagined and created. Lyle Ashton Harris’s photographs were interwoven throughout. But perhaps the most revealing section of the catalogue are the acknowledgments that stretch on for four pages, naming 288 people who helped create the projects. And those were just the folks who participated before the opening.

*Uncommon Sense* was an experiment that could only have happened at The Temporary Contemporary, a flexible space in a flexible institution with a low-key mastermind, John Bowsher, in charge of the ambition and insanity of the installation. It met with decidedly mixed reviews, but in retrospect it seems ahead of its time. Social Practice is now accepted as a genre, and a couple of the artists have subsequently picked up MacArthur awards (Rick Lowe and Mel Chin, who orchestrated the GALA Committee). But more importantly, in a time when museums are being asked to rethink their very structure, here was an exhibition that was inclusive, participatory, democratic, and non-hierarchical, where you could walk in the door and become a part of the show.



John Outterbridge holding a “peace talk” as part of Mierle Ukeles’s *Unburning Freedom Hall* in *Uncommon Sense*, 1997, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

The Lillian and Jon Lovelace Director’s Program Fund is established to provide seed money to launch programs that traditionally find little support from the government, foundations, or corporate sources.

In honor of her husband Sydney, trustee Audrey Irmas establishes The Sydney Irmas Exhibition Endowment to support one major exhibition each year.

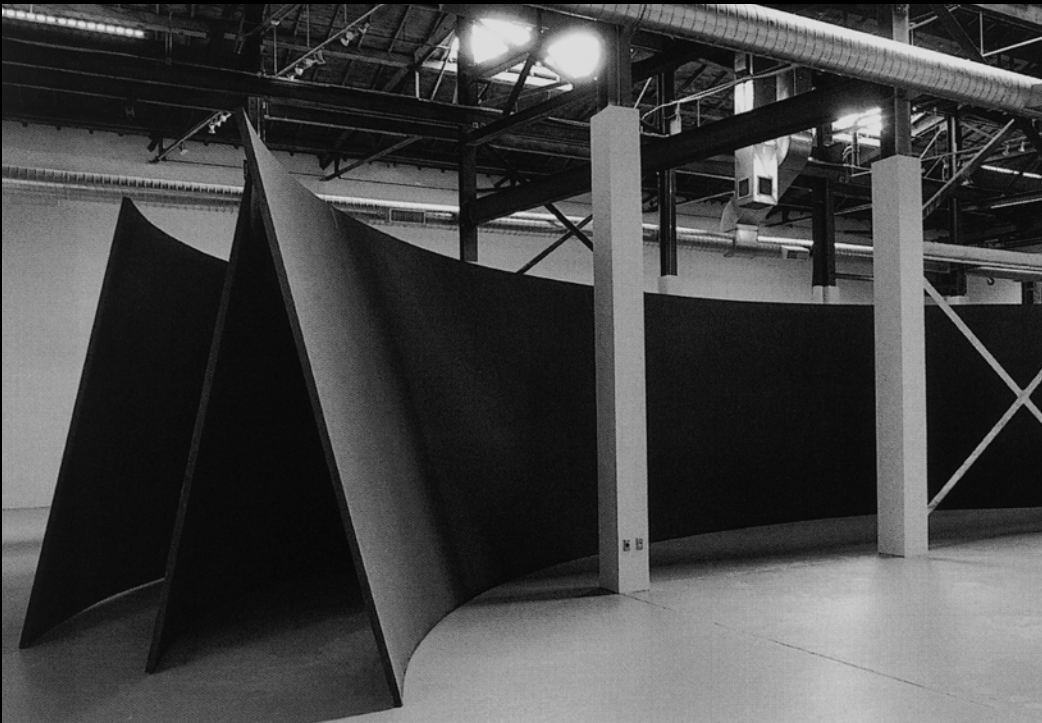
The Ron Burkle Endowment for Architecture and Design Programs is established thanks to the generosity of philanthropist and MOCA trustee Ron Burkle, whose strong interest in the field led him to develop a fund for initial research and planning. Early beneficiaries are *At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture*, a 2000 survey of twentieth-century architecture and urbanism from around the world seen from the vantage point of the start of the new millennium, and *The Architecture of R.M. Schindler*. This 2001 exhibition surveys Schindler’s work and his contributions to the history of modern architecture and Los Angeles.

*Ana Mendieta: Siluetas* is MOCA’s first presentation of *Silueta Works in Mexico*, a portfolio of recently acquired photographs that document Mendieta’s use of her body in a series of performative outdoor sculptural installations done between 1973 and 1977. Acquired with a grant provided by The Judith Rothschild Foundation, the *Silueta Works in Mexico* are shown along with the *Rupestrian Sculpture Series* (1981), black-and-white photographs of representations of prehistoric fertility goddesses carved on the walls of a cave in the woods of Jaruco in

Havana. This exhibition is part of the Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program. It is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz.

*Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979* explores the complex relationship linking the creative process, action or performance, and works of art in the postwar period. The exhibition consists of nearly one hundred fifty artists and collaboratives from more than twenty countries and movements including Arte Povera, the Gutai Group, Happenings, process art, and performance art. *Out of Actions* is the latest in a series of thematic explorations showcasing MOCA’s belief that contemporary museums should produce thematic exhibitions that shed light on art by seeing it in new contexts. The exhibition travels to Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna; Museu d’Art Contemporani, Barcelona; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. The exhibition is organized by chief curator Paul Schimmel.

*Richard Serra* consists of new works made in direct response to the unique spaces of The Geffen Contemporary. Serra creates nine monumental steel sculptures—seven *Torque Ellipses*, *Pickhan’s Progress*, and *58 X 64 X 70*—and, together with a room of models, they fill the entire 55,000 square feet of exhibition space. The exhibition travels to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain. It is organized by Koshalek and Julia Brown, curator for special exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.



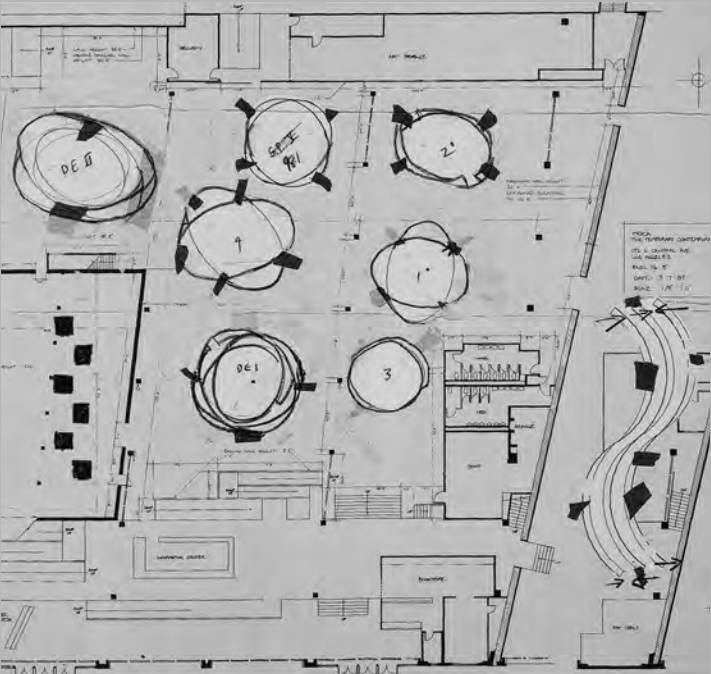
Richard Serra, *Pickhan’s Progress*, 1998, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



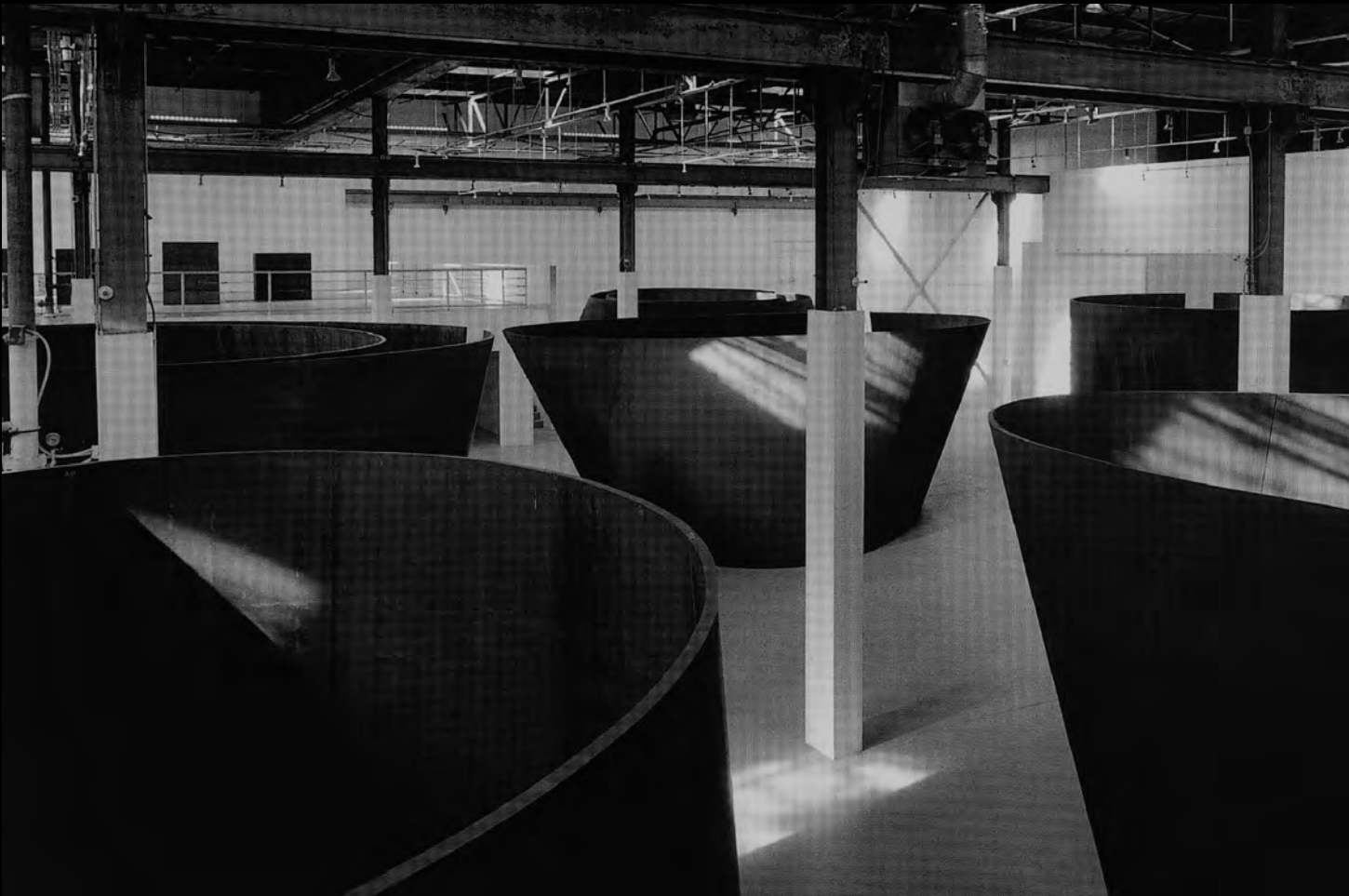
I have had a long history with Richard Serra throughout my career, having believed in his work years before I came to MOCA. From the beginning, I was captivated by his originality and audacity, and by the scale of his work. Perhaps this appreciation also stemmed from my architecture background: In Serra I saw a basic conceptual and material integrity. That, along with the way he manipulates spatial relationships between the viewer and the work, immediately rang true. One intuitively recognizes advanced artistic thinking and output, and I felt right away that Serra would enter the pantheon of America's greatest sculptors.

Our association began while I was a curator at the Walker Art Center. When we opened its new building in 1972, Serra made one of his first large steel-plate pieces, *Joplin*, for the inaugural show curated by Martin Friedman (to my mind, still the finest exemplar of a museum director). A little later, during my time as assistant director for the National Endowment for the Arts, we commissioned, along with the General Services Administration, one of Serra's most renowned works, *Tilted Arc*, for the Federal Building in New York. Its curved wall of oxidized steel revealed gradations of color as it traced a subtle arc over 120 feet long. (*The New York Times* critic Michael Berenson called it "confrontational" but also "gentle, silent and private.") We commissioned another major piece for the park by the Civil Courts building in St. Louis, *Twain*, an irregular triangle that occupied nearly an entire city block. When I was director of the Hudson River Museum in Westchester County, New York, curator Julia Brown and I installed a giant Serra sculpture, *Elevator*, 1980, inside the museum's building.

As MOCA's director, I turned to Serra twice. For our 1986 contemporary survey exhibition *Individuals*, also curated by Julia Brown, we included his magnificent double arc *Ishmael*. The high point, however, was Serra's solo exhibition at the Geffen Contemporary in 1998—again, with Julia. This included seven massive figures called *Torqued Ellipses*, inspired by the soaring space of a seventeenth-century Baroque church in Rome. We used forklifts to move its 40-ton steel slabs into place. (The show was subsequently shipped—through the Panama Canal—to the Guggenheim Bilbao.) In the *Los Angeles Times*, Christopher Knight called the exhibition "a flat-out tour de force by America's greatest living sculptor," and he noted that "Serra carves space." The greatest tribute came from Serra himself: "Working in The TC," he said, "was like working outside."



Richard Serra, floor plan of MOCA installation, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles





I was pleased to accept Richard Koshalek’s invitation to organize the Sam Francis retrospective at MOCA, now almost twenty-five years ago. Richard is a brilliant programmer and I deeply respect him, so it was a pleasure to work with him and Kathleen Bartels, who became my partner. I owe her an amend because I was no fun to work with, but I couldn’t have done the show without her.

I loved Sam’s work and I thought it needed to be shown in full, all the more so because it became a memorial show after Sam’s death in 1994. He deserved a large and full exhibition, which the show became, filling the new space of The Temporary Contemporary with some of the best painting ever done in the later twentieth century. I was pleased with it, doubly so since I had wished to do such a show when I was at Pasadena in the early 1970s. Sam had long been the ranking master in California, and he had earned in full the deep respect and love of all.

In fact, the love felt for Sam and his art had bestowed on him on a mythic status; he was deemed a mystery, beyond the understanding of ordinary critical and historical approaches. Time and again I had been told this. I didn’t buy it. Sam was a human, and he and his work had its ups and downs, which I felt needed a reasoned approach. My catalogue essay reflected my thinking, and I hope it brought some sanity to the writing on him. I loved doing the show, and I was pleased with the results. We represented Sam with the best work we could borrow. But we still have not seen his oeuvre at its fullest, at its highest reaches, because several paintings have been buried in private and museum collections in Asia and Europe. So our understanding of Sam remains somewhat incomplete, despite all. If we could unlock just some of those paintings, another show could be mounted, this time of unknown masterpieces. May it be so.



Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990, 1999, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

After twenty transformative years at the helm of the museum, Koshalek steps down. Writing about Koshalek’s resignation in the *Los Angeles Times*, Suzanne Muchnic says that Koshalek leaves a thriving institution that “operates on a \$10 million annual budget with a staff of 75, attracts about 450,000 visitors a year, organizes exhibitions that travel all over the world and has a 4,000-piece collection of postwar art.” Koshalek becomes president of ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, California.

Jeremy Strick, the Frances and Thomas Dittmer Curator of Twentieth-Century Painting and Sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago, is selected as the new director.

The family of Dr. Katherine S. Marmor establishes The Katherine S. Marmor Award, a permanent endowment to assist in the publication of catalogues documenting emerging Los Angeles artists’ first MOCA exhibitions.

*Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990*, a selective retrospective in memory of internationally acclaimed abstract painter Sam Francis (1923-1994), includes a rare showing of his early paintings from the late 1940s continuing through 1990, with over fifty paintings and thirty works on paper. The exhibition travels to The Menil Collection, Houston; Malmö Konsthall, Sweden; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain; and Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, Italy. The exhibition is organized by art historian and curator William C. Agee.

*In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O’Hara and American Art* examines the influence of the poet and critic Frank O’Hara (1926-1966) on American art. One of the most renowned poets of his generation, O’Hara is also a central figure in the New York art world of the 1950s and ’60s. More than one hundred works by twenty-six artists, linked by O’Hara, are featured. The exhibition travels to the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, and the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, New York, and is organized by associate curator Russell Ferguson.

*Barbara Kruger* is the first comprehensive overview of the work of one of the most renowned and influential artists of the past three decades. The exhibition presents the artist’s work from 1978 to the present. It includes a dynamic installation designed closely with the artist, as well as selections from her photographic prints on paper and vinyl, lenticular images and etched metal plates, audio, video, installation, sculpture works, sign-painted texts, billboards, and new work made specifically for the exhibition. The exhibition travels to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. It is organized by curator Ann Goldstein.

*The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica, and Mira Schendel* is the fourth exhibition in MOCA’s Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program, initiated under Richard Koshalek’s view of the museum as an international art center. Encompassing approximately one hundred works, this exhibition examines the contributions of five artists who created innovative and highly individualistic work in Latin America from the late 1950s to the 1970s. These artists moved away from traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture for a new aesthetic that connected directly with the cultures of Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, the countries in which they lived. The exhibition is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz and the 1999 Ahmanson curatorial fellow Rina Carvajal.

*Panza: The Legacy of a Collector* is the first joint presentation of the two collections of Count Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo at MOCA. The exhibition features the eighty historically significant works purchased by MOCA in 1984 along with the 1994 Panza gift, which consists of seventy works created between 1982 and 1993 in a variety of media by ten Los Angeles artists. The exhibition is organized by associate curator Cornelia H. Butler.



Hélio Oiticica in *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom*, 1999, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



In Memory of Frank O’Hara by Marisela Norte

Thinking outside the Box Office  
We sang a chorus of ticket prices  
Freeway onramps  
and restroom directions  
caught up between the earnest promises  
of Sally Hansen’s Lip Inflation Plumping  
irony  
and the escape that only  
a marked down “revolutionary” hair conditioner could bring

After work  
The Day for Night Cream facial  
Was there to revive you  
Like another screening of a  
Favorite French movie

We of the Box Office  
Liked to believe it was all  
Cinema  
No matter what anyone said  
We shared baskets of specially seasoned French Fries  
From a Japanese restaurant  
Listened to Nancy Sinatra sing duets with Yoko and  
Selena  
Crossed the First Street bridge for  
Bean and cheese burritos from  
Al and Bea’s  
Did the double bills  
At the New Beverly  
Cocktails and Sloe Gin  
Dances at Hop Louie

Museums, bus stops and train stations  
Are all good collection centers for those  
Who may have gone astray

But standing in a train station  
Even if only for a brief stop  
To adjust the narrative, the volume  
Or the hemline  
Will at least make you  
Believe that you are on your way  
Somewhere

Here  
I chose to go with your eyes, Frank  
And take you with me  
To the bus stop of your choice  
Since neither one of us  
Would be driving

We laughed at the Circus Peanut  
Toe nails  
Winking at us  
From inside  
Off-white jeweled sandals  
In mid November

Counted Swedish tourists  
The men who carried their  
Wives’ handbags  
And still gave them money

You and I  
We stood at bus stops  
Long after the walls  
Had been repainted  
And the names  
Had all changed

Together  
We caught the last light  
Of another disposable day  
In Los Angeles  
And passed our notebooks  
Back and forth  
Across a table at  
Clifton’s Cafeteria

We waited in line  
For day old loaves of Rye bread  
At the old Grand Central Market  
When there used to be  
Bread people could afford  
after their once a month  
Splurge of “poet’s cheese”

Once a month  
I treat myself to a Coke  
Just to think about you

No one was looking at their phones then

This wasn’t the fair, long-haired Los Angeles  
That filled my teenage diaries  
This was watching the City in the beginning of  
A love affair that felt more  
Like a nervous breakdown  
A Happening before they went back to  
Write about what’s happening

Back then no one had a phone to love  
So remember, you did

“One General, Two Seniors, No Children”  
But the notebook scribble reads  
“Two Generals, now Seniors eat children.”

You sat next to me  
During the endless ticket transaction  
Whispering “Action!”  
Sometimes like a silent movie  
It rolled  
Sometimes not



I remember pulling Paul Mazursky out of the line  
At the box office  
And escorting him downstairs  
The Director turned to the unmarried woman  
And said “I’m here to see Frank.”  
Two beats  
“I’ll tell him you’re here.”

Thinking outside the Box Office  
We sang a chorus of ticket prices  
Freeway onramps  
and restroom directions  
swimming upstream of  
consciousness

writing it all down

A small fox with a very long tail  
Buys her Student ticket  
With an expired ID  
“Weren’t you Marisela Norte?”  
She asks

I bury the question mark  
In a kitchen drawer  
Along with AAA batteries from the 99 cent store  
blue envelopes from the fancy downtown Florist  
those whose contents promise to revive wilting bouquets  
and stale prose

I crush the leaves from a tree  
I planted on Grand Avenue  
And pour them into a paper cup  
That has your name on it  
To be read later/aloud  
Imagining they are  
After all  
A poem

***The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica, and Mira Schendel (1999) / Alma Ruiz***

MOCA’s Latin American Art and Exhibitions Program was created out of Richard Koshalek’s desire to extend the museum’s creative borders beyond the United States and Europe. *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica, and Mira Schendel* was perhaps the most ambitious exhibition to come out of the initiative early on. The five selected artists had been the subject of numerous retrospectives and much academic writing mostly in Latin America. They were well represented in public and private collections, and yet their work remained relatively unknown in the United States. Co-curator Rina Carvajal and I took the opportunity to introduce not just their work but their collective creative processes to MOCA visitors.

The artists had all experienced authoritarian upheaval: Both Oiticica and Clark were born in Brazil and, during the military coup that began in 1964, self-exiled in London and Paris, respectively. Goeritz was born and educated in Berlin. He left Germany in 1941, living in Morocco and Spain before eventually settling in Mexico. An architect and a pioneer in public art, he experimented with site-specific sculpture, an art form largely unknown in Mexico at the time. Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt) and Schendel were European Jews who settled in Latin America in 1939 and ’49, respectively.

Borrowing the title *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom* from Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa (who used it to describe Oiticica’s work), we thought it applicable to the ideas and philosophies that had motivated all of these artists to abandon traditional artistic practices such as painting and sculpture for a new and more participatory aesthetic closely connected to the cultures of the countries where they lived. As we saw it, they had left behind the modernist canon—mainly geometric abstraction and constructivism—to embrace experimental practices with strong links to architecture and other mediums. The open spaces of The Temporary Contemporary offered a perfect setting for their search for freedom of expression.

While we designed smaller galleries to display the delicate rice paper works of Mira Schendel and the weblike metal constructions of Gego, we left the rest of the building unblocked to give patrons room to engage in active participation and discovery as the artists intended. Visitors could walk around Goeritz’s full-scale metal and drywall towers, built inside a replica of the artist’s Mexico City studio, the place where he’d designed multiple versions of towers as templates for his emotional architecture and public-sculpture ideas. Lygia Clark’s *Biological Architectures* consisted of plastic structures with nylon bags on their ends. By placing their arms and legs inside the nylon bags to hold up the frame, visitors could improvise body movements or wrap themselves up in a plastic-like cocoon. Perhaps the most challenging installation was our re-creation of Oiticica’s expansive *Eden*, a gigantic invitation to examine the social role that art plays in human society. We built a sandy floor, water pools, cozy nests, and a tent where one could spend hours listening to music in solitude or with friends and family. Like the other works in the exhibition, *Eden* destabilized conventional ideas about the commercial value of the art object—repurposing raw space to encourage exploratory forms of museum display.



Barbara Kruger–Thinking of You (1999) / by Ann Goldstein

Many of my projects have been the happy consequence of one thing leading to another. This project grew out of my experience of working with Barbara on the exhibition *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* (1989), which I co-curated with former MOCA chief curator Mary Jane Jacob. Barbara’s project was envisioned to be a commissioned mural spanning the entirety of The Temporary Contemporary’s south-facing wall. Her initial proposal adapted the format of the wall to that of the American flag, with the Pledge of Allegiance occupying the stripes of the flag, bordered by a series of questions, including, “Who is bought and sold? Who is free to choose? Who dies first? Who laughs last?” That proposal launched a remarkable journey in which the museum and the surrounding community of Little Tokyo engaged in a profound discussion about history and accountability. The museum is situated very close to the debarkation point from which Japanese Americans were taken to internment camps during WWII. In the wake of these conversations, Barbara revised the work, keeping the motif of the flag but removing the pledge and replacing it with questions. *Untitled (Questions)* was ultimately realized one year after the exhibition closed, and it remained on view for two years, from 1990-1992. (In 2018, it was realized again on the north wall of The Geffen Contemporary.) Following that extraordinary experience, I was privileged to work again with Barbara on her first large-scale museum exhibition at MOCA. We again collaborated with John Bowsher, whose incomparable gifts at installation enabled us to spatialize three decades of work—both existing works and new works created specifically for the exhibition—using the expansive architecture offered by The Geffen Contemporary. I especially recall the three long walls, each spanning the width of Building 5, which served as dramatic and provocative portals to enter the exhibition. While it was not something in the front of my mind at the time, I believe that, at 35,000 square feet, it was the largest solo exhibition devoted to a woman artist—and perhaps not just at MOCA, but anywhere. Then, and now, as Barbara’s work was recently the subject of the largest survey exhibition of her work to date, which opened at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2021, I remain awed by the uncanny relevance of her practice, and how germane, pertinent, and crucial her work is today.

Barbara Kruger on Her Installation *Thinking of You* (2019)

Working with that space at The TC was heaven. The opportunity to spatialize my work was thrilling for me, because architecture is my first love. I don’t work with models; I pretty much go into a space and I know what I’m going to do, and with the brilliance of Ann Goldstein and John Bowsher, who was an amazing spirit, we built up in that space. Previously there hadn’t been a huge 90-foot wall when you entered. We really wanted to reconfigure that and take advantage of the verticality of the space.

Showing there changed my life. MOCA’s support meant so much to me when no museum had given me that support. Richard’s leadership there, for years, really laid the ground-work for MOCA being a curatorially driven institution like no other, at that point. When I was invited to do the show there it was in a space that, to me, had been, and still remains, the most accommodating and challenging and really joyous space for an artist to work in. It was malleable, it was open for transformation. It could be scaled both large and small. It was a thrill for me, an amazing moment.

To me, The TC has been a template for the way museums look, and for the really sensitive renovation of huge, expansive spaces. Not over-renovation, but to really keep the power and spectacle of the original bones and transform it into a something that’s welcoming to contemporary art. MOCA was way, way ahead of the curve in terms of that space, but also in terms, again, of the curatorial power that was allowed to flourish there. For years people in New York who worked at museums so envied that curatorial power, the ability to do complicated, ideational, theme-based shows that weren’t one monographic show after another. No one did that the way MOCA did.



Barbara Kruger, 1999, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



Trustee Dallas Price-Van Breda makes a generous gift of \$10 million to honor Richard Koshalek’s twenty-year leadership and to celebrate MOCA’s new director Jeremy Strick.

*At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture* draws upon recent, groundbreaking scholarship in architectural history with a particular focus on the complex relationship between innovation and tradition, and the profound impact of technology on architecture and ways of living throughout the past century. The exhibition travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City; Ludwig Museum/Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, Cologne; and New York’s Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The exhibition is organized by Koshalek and curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith.

*Gabriel Orozco* is the first major survey of the internationally recognized artist. The exhibition includes approximately one hundred works produced from 1990 to 2000. Selections of his sculpture, photography, video, and works on paper highlight the artist’s interest in the formal and conceptual shifts within contemporary art practices. The exhibition is conceived as an all-encompassing collaboration between institutions in Los Angeles and Mexico, the artist’s country of birth. Under the purview of the Latin American Art Research and Exhibition



Dallas Price Van-Breda, 2019, Santa Monica, California

Program, the exhibition travels to the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Monterrey, Mexico. The exhibition is organized by assistant curator Alma Ruiz.

As the Latin American Art Research and Exhibition Program gains momentum, a generous gift by contemporary art collector and entrepreneur Eugenio López helps underwrite research, exhibitions, and acquisitions under the newly established Jumex Fund for Contemporary Latin American Art. With López’s support, this fund becomes a distinctive originator of programming and collecting contemporary Latin American art for the benefit of a broad and diverse constituency. With increased support for Latin American art in Los Angeles, the museum organizes twelve exhibitions and acquires over one hundred works for its permanent collection from 1995 to 2015.

### Gabriel Orozco (2000) / Alma Ruiz

We mounted a mid-career survey spanning ten years of Gabriel Orozco’s work in the summer of 2000. In his art, Orozco favors unexpected associations and conceptual links over formal ones. He makes works that are born out of actions recording his daily life, the relation of objects to his own body, and his ongoing interest in movement. As a post-studio artist, he has foregone the security of remaining in one place. He frequently travels, living for extended periods in Mexico City, New York, Paris, Tokyo, and Bali. By rejecting the idea of the studio as a fixed location, he has also eschewed the possibility of making one kind of art.

While Orozco was well known in Europe, he had been little seen in Mexico, his country of origin, so we decided to organize the show and its catalogue as a bilingual and binational collaboration. After its debut in Los Angeles, the exhibition traveled to the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, in Monterrey, Mexico.

Given a choice of buildings, Orozco selected the Isozaki galleries as he felt them more congenial to his art. The space remained as the architect designed it—with no temporary walls built to section it—thus mirroring the physical openness in the artist’s creative practice. Culled from private and public collections in Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Mexico, and the United States, the 132 artworks we selected ranged from sculpture to drawing, collage, photography, video, and installation.

Playful, participatory conceptualism permeates Orozco’s work. As visitors walked through the presentation, they could contemplate the art, but they could also play with it. For example, in *Ping Pond Table* (1998), visitors could use paddles to send ping pong balls flying across a waterlily pond in the center of two intersecting tables. If a ball landed in the water, an attendant hurried to retrieve and dry it so that the game could continue. In *Oval with Pendulum* (1996), a player could strike a cue ball, expecting it to hit one or more balls and then go down a pocket. But the cue ball was suspended from the ceiling with a thin steel cable, so when it was hit it swung back and forth like a pendulum, barely skimming the table’s smooth green surface. Other sculptural pieces scattered around the gallery floor resembled a metaphorical garden. In his exhibition Orozco turned the visitor into an urban stroller, a *flâneur*, with no other purpose than to observe contemporary life through art and thus experience another, more playful reality.



Gabriel Orozco, 2000, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



When I first went to look at The TC, I had a feeling of openness and possibility that seemed infinitely flexible. I remember thinking, “Oh, my god; I love this space. I can work here?” The conversation started with, “What do you want to do?” Then, for me the process is, “What is this, what is here, and what is this space?” The project grows from that line of questioning.

Now, obviously I didn’t get to work to the full scale of The TC, that’s enormous, but I was spurred on by that question and also, most crucially, by the opportunity to work on-site over a long period of time. And to have the support! John Bowsher was there, an amazing human being, and a great solver of technical problems. At The TC you can start to make the piece and respond and make perhaps new decisions as it’s going on; you don’t have it all figured out in advance. The institution and the people were very generous that way, and I trusted that process. It is uncommon, and it is crucial to the development of a work. Obviously, artists are nervous, they don’t know what a piece is going to become—or will it be any good or is this going to be anything at all? I had the sense that this was a situation fundamentally built on trusting artists.



Ann Hamilton: the capacity of absorption, 1988, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

**Paul Schimmel:** More than anything else, it was the building, ultimately—this undefined free space—that allowed a monumental change to take place, one that had far greater reverberations around the art world than we could have imagined and affects the nature of what is being done today. Equally audacious within the canons of the museum world was the move to buy the Panza Collection, given that on one hand everyone said you don’t buy collections from a trustee, and on the other hand, well, what did you pay for it? How did you pay for it? Those kinds of true masterstrokes are things that we take for granted now, vis-à-vis purchasing collections.

I believe that MOCA is the model for that kind of converted warehouse space that has enormous warmth to it, in terms of drawing a younger audience, which it really does. And, you know, people need a sense of community. And in the last thirty years, I think MOCA has both exploited that and not fully benefited from it. It’s a very different audience now. It’s no longer a specialist audience. It is much more of a repeat audience, and their social interaction within a work of art, something that The TC has extraordinary armature for, has really changed the nature of contemporary art museums. That’s a big change.

**Richard Koshalek:** Again and again, in monographic exhibitions, thematic shows, and complex historical shows, MOCA set the mark, and the international press and the international audience was, as you know, expansive. A show that would do very well at MOCA would end up with ten times the number of visitors from various venues. It became so successful in exporting these big thematic shows—and not exporting easy things, either—that it became clear that this is what MOCA was made to do. These were big complex shows, and no other institution was putting four, six, years into these exhibitions. Not MoMA, which tried to do it with *High and Low* and then gave up. So we had that whole area, whether it was in architecture, whether it was emerging art, or whether it was in historical and revisionist exhibitions.

**PS:** Yes, and that moment was a long time coming. Yours started back at the Walker; mine began at the Newport Art Museum, and it had gone through many, many transformations. And then it’s like magic, that these things sort of plunk down back-to-back and the potential that had been released previously for that space comes alive again.

**RK:** No doubt about it. And in our world, Paul, that might be called research, but a different kind of research, right? It has to do with research that is based on, for example, on asking: What kind of installation? How are you going to manage this? How are you going to build this? How are you going to put the tidal pools under the floor? It’s that kind of research, so it’s very practical sometimes. But it’s also research in knowing what the artist’s career has been and maybe what it could be, whether it’s Serra and his *Torqued Ellipses*, or with you and Robert Gober, it’s research based on our past experience.



Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955–62, 1992, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



A Conversation Between Suzanne Muchnic and Richard Koshalek (2019)

**Suzanne Muchnic:** I went on staff at the *Los Angeles Times* in 1978, and I'd been free-lancing really steadily, from 1976 onward. That's not long before the push for a new museum of contemporary art became news, yes?

**Richard Koshalek:** Yes. MOCA's original date of founding is 1979.

**SM:** Right. So when I started at the *L.A. Times* I was principally working as a critic, writing reviews of exhibitions, just as the art scene started really growing, and—largely thanks to MOCA—many more galleries began to sprout up. There was a lot of excitement and art became news in the minds of newspaper editors. Even they noticed that something was going on. And we started doing more feature articles and interviews on all sorts of art issues, people, and events. I was writing more and more feature articles, and my editors wanted me to concentrate on that. And I didn't really want to stop writing reviews, so I said I would try that for a year, and of course it went on for, you know, twenty more. I think all together I was there for thirty-one, thirty-two years. So I had a front row seat on all of these amazing developments in the art world, from MOCA to the Getty. LACMA was undergoing a lot of growth at that time, too.

**RK:** What were the first articles you wrote on MOCA?

**SM:** The one I remember is the interview I did with you. You had probably been there for a couple of years. And I remember it was disarming because you wanted to know about me. And reporters aren't supposed to talk about themselves, so that was really unusual. And we're pretty much the same age and we both had these Midwestern roots (laughs), but normally we wouldn't be talking about that. And I remember other people saying, "He's open to new ways of thinking" and there's no sense of, "This is how we do things." It was more, "Oh, we're going to try this and we'll think it through and if that doesn't work, well, we'll try something else." So that, you know, really impressed me. By that time Pontus—I never met Pontus Hultén and—

**RK:** You never met him?

**SM:** No, I never did because at the time he was there, frankly, I don't think he was all that visible. And I was the new person, so I would not be the one that the newspaper would send out, you know, to interview the great man.

**RK:** At that time, what role did you think Pontus was playing?

**SM:** Well, in my mind, he was immensely important in that he brought this credibility. I mean, it impressed everyone who knew anything at all (laughs). And that was worth a lot. I mean, if the man didn't do anything else, that was his gift. And what I heard was that he had trouble dealing with a lot of the personalities. And he said it felt like he was being bitten to death by a lot of ducks.

**RK:** He was quoted as saying that—I think it might have been included in his obituary—meaning that that the trustees were preventing him from practicing his profession. He disappeared, but he came back for all the right moments. He came back for the opening of The TC; he came back for the opening of *The First Show*. The curator really was Julia Brown, though Pontus and I advised her and worked with her.

**SM:** Was it Bob Irwin who brought you in?

**RK:** I had done two shows with Bob and he was the one that recommended me, and Sam Francis recommended Pontus. DeWain Valentine claimed that he was the one to say, "Hire both." What do you remember about the city at the time MOCA was just starting? I know Bob Irwin said L.A. was artist rich, institution poor.

**SM:** I think there was so much pent-up energy. You have to go back a bit to the failed Pasadena Art Museum. There had been real power and excitement focused on that institution. It had become a very lively place when it was located in the old Chinese-style building on Los Robles. But before that it had been a tiny art center, and a group of patrons wanted to take it back to the original location, to where the Norton Simon Museum is today. But that didn't happen, and they put up a new building in 1969, which was in debt from the day it opened, and it became clear that they could not make it work, financially. And that was sad and traumatic, and there was great dismay when Norton Simon took it over, but it would have folded otherwise. A lot of artists who had given works to the museum were angry and distressed, and to add to that there was embarrassment about the area not being able to, or willing to, support a museum of contemporary art. And so, this energy was roiling among the collectors, and the artists, and all the professionals who worked in the arts. They just desperately wanted something new to be born, and LACMA wasn't doing it because it was a general art

museum—still is—and had a component of contemporary art, but nothing that could satisfy the need. And a movement started to establish something downtown. It seemed to me that almost instantly little galleries started popping up downtown, just makeshift places. And a lot of them didn't last, but everybody wanted to be there when a new museum opened. People had faith that it was going to happen. So, I think this backlog of energy created it as much as anything else. Of course there had to be money to do it, obviously, and civic will on the parts of city leaders.

**RK:** And then, once we got into The Temporary Contemporary, what impact do you think it had on L.A. artists?

**SM:** I think it was the most exciting thing that I had ever witnessed, and the fact that it was in an unfinished space made it all the better. And downtown. And the space, you know, it's not a thing of beauty, but it just works. It can be divided up in all kinds of different ways. There is no set path that one has to take. And then, the programming, starting with *Available Light*, which was incredible—like nothing I had ever seen. And having a place to go to see this adventurous work, which could not have been done anywhere else. And it wouldn't be as appropriate or even doable in a beautifully finished, architectural masterpiece. It needed that kind of almost makeshift, you know, found space that was in, not a dangerous part of the city, but sort of a grubby, forgotten section. I had never seen serious, important, valuable art in that kind of space so it did make a big impression on me, that the focus was really on the art. And also, the fact that the group behind this didn't want to wait until it had a fancy building. You know, it wasn't a case of the building comes first. No, it was a case of the art comes first. But also we knew that a permanent structure was coming; this was not just a temporary museum that's going to be here today and gone tomorrow. I think that L.A. had not been on the map before and—it should have been because the artists were here—but it needed an institution that would give it the resources and a substantial kind of image. It needed to be taken seriously as a place that mattered and that people had to come and see and be part of.

**RK:** What are the early MOCA shows you most remember?

**SM:** An early show that was really important was called *Individuals*, which was in The TC.

**RK:** Yes, that was our inaugural exhibit at the Arata Isozaki building, *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, held in both buildings.

**SM:** I thought that show was important because L.A. is not a unified sort of place (laughs). And though of course artists everywhere are individuals, this struck a chord in L.A. because there wasn't a received sort of structure. There wasn't a MoMA, there wasn't a Whitney, so it always felt like people are more independent here in terms of creating themselves and pushing boundaries. We like to see artists as individuals as opposed to being part of a movement. And then there was the Case Study show. Yeah, that was fascinating, too, and a piece of L.A. history that's important. And I think that the inclusion of architecture in the mission was really significant, because I mean, MoMA has design and architecture that they included to some degree, but most museums—

**RK:** Never on the scale that we did at MOCA.

**SM:** And then of course there was the Panza Collection. Seeing that for the first time was just mind-boggling. To get that core collection that no one thought would have even been available, much less affordable. That was just stunning. And it came at the moment when the museum had its permanent, so to speak, home, and that it was also part of the city, it was city-funded. And I remember when Michael Heizer had his piece there, he said, "You know, there's nowhere in New York that I could do anything like this." And I think artists loved it for that very reason; it offered so many possibilities for them.



Between 1988 and 2000 MOCA's Traveling Exhibition Program sends thirty-one exhibitions to seventy-eight institutions and fifteen countries around the world, fulfilling the museum's chief objective of building alliances through exhibition exchange and curatorial collaborations. Some of the museums MOCA teams up with are:

- Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City
- Art Tower Mito, Contemporary Art Center, Tokyo
- CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France
- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
- Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland
- Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague
- Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome
- Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
- Institute of Contemporary Art, London
- Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Julio González, Valencia, Spain
- Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
- Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne
- Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland
- Ludwig Museum/Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, Cologne
- MAK Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna
- Malmö Konsthall, Sweden
- Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Canada
- Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris
- Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Monterrey, Mexico
- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
- Museo Tamayo, Mexico City
- Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona, Spain
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo
- Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, Belgium.
- Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna
- Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome
- Philadelphia Museum of Art
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- The Menil Collection, Houston
- The Museum of Modern Art, Gunma, Japan
- The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Vancouver Art Gallery
- Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

*Some of the names of the museums and exhibition spaces listed in this selected history have changed; we use the names that were extant at the time of the exhibitions.*



# THE MUSEUM AS A VERB

JOSEPH GIOVANNINI

Like runners passing batons in a relay, incumbents after their term in office pass the baton to their successors. The hand-off is a photograph in time of the state of the old regime as it pivots to the next.

Richard Koshalek resigned from the directorship of MOCA in 1999, nearly a generation after he assumed the office: “I had done what I needed to do; it was time for new leadership,” he said in an interview, putting it simply. What was in fact spectacular about the hand-off was that when he came on board in 1980 first as deputy director and chief curator and then director in 1983, there was no baton to pass or receive: no buildings, no endowment, no collection, no programs, and next to no staff. The working bank account was small, and the balance fugitive, and the board was still recovering from divisive trustee wars that had threatened the nascent museum. There was a name and even a future address—the promising and impressive “Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art” on Grand Avenue—but no institution whatsoever.

By 1999, the museum had two unique, world-class buildings that established a critical mass of some 153,000 square feet (three football fields), with no less than 85,000 square feet devoted to galleries. Both buildings were free of debt. MOCA had an endowment of \$50 million, a staff of seventy five, and a collection of some 4,000 works, many of marquee quality and together worth at the time about \$260 million (between \$1 and \$2 billion today). The legacy of 208 exhibitions and 87 catalogues and artist’s books had earned MOCA a stellar international reputation and local respect, not to mention a robust gate that opened up downtown for the first time in more than a generation as a place to spend a Saturday or Sunday. For a startup museum that began at a standstill, the programs had established an accelerating momentum that, by Koshalek’s departure, had long since set the museum on a roll. In a profile of Koshalek that I wrote for *The New York Times* in 2001, Michael Govan, then director of the Dia Center for the Arts in Manhattan, said, “Richard ran the best program of any large-scale contemporary art museum in the United States.”

It was the startup that could, a sui generis invention that can partially be traced to a Cartesian 0, 0 point of origin at a moment in time in Minneapolis. In 1967, then a freshman member of the curatorial staff at the Walker Art Center, Koshalek was attending a staff meeting at which other Walker curators spoke about the background and qualifications they brought to the museum. Most took an institutional approach, citing their previous work experience, grants, and their affiliations with foundations and schools. When it came Koshalek’s turn to speak, he cut to the chase, speaking more to his motivation and goals rather than qualifications and experience. He said, simply, “I think we should talk to the artist first.”

It was this position that guided Koshalek at MOCA, so that at the hand-off in 1999, his legacy—achieved of course in collaboration with staff, trustees, and artists—was one that posited the artist as the keystone figure in the museum’s



KOSHALEK EFFECTIVELY DE-INSTITUTIONALIZED THE INSTITUTION BY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF FILTERS BETWEEN THE WALLS OF THE ARTIST STUDIO AND THE WALLS OF THE MUSEUM.

construct. Koshalek effectively de-institutionalized the institution by reducing the number of filters between the walls of the artist studio and the walls of the museum. In many museums, artists effectively play support roles that “illustrate” and perpetuate the museum’s cultural mission and social identity, conforming to already established traditions and the thrust of its collections. Koshalek’s insight in Minneapolis affirmed MOCA’s own origins in the initiative of the Artists Advisory Council: MOCA was an artist-founded museum conceived by artists for the artist. The council may have disbanded once MOCA was actually formed, but two artists (Robert Irwin and Sam Francis) were invited onto the board. Koshalek confirmed his allegiance to what he calls “the creative individual” in other initiatives, such as bringing artists into the museum’s educational programs to explain their work and that of others.

Koshalek was not shaped in the traditional museum protocols—as instilled, for example, in the corridors of Harvard’s Fogg or the Williams College art department—but at the more hands-on Walker Art Center, run by Martin and Mildred Friedman, who captured the voices of individual artists by engaging them directly.

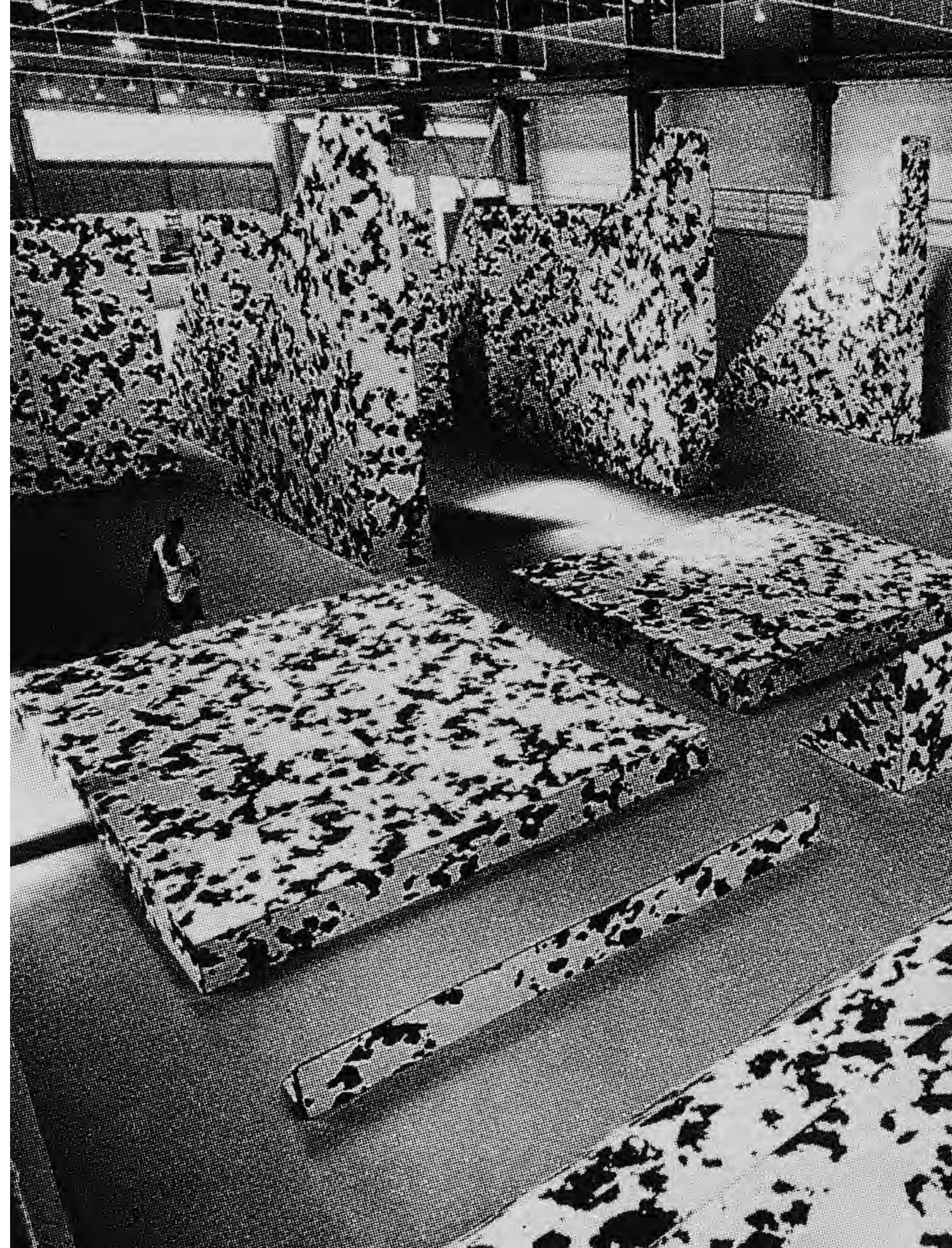
Of course, from New York, MoMA’s long shadow reached Los Angeles as a paradigm museum for modern and contemporary art. But neither Koshalek nor MOCA’s founding director, Pontus Hultén, fell into the MoMA trap as a wannabe caught in the aspic of Modernism—siloed into departments, impaled on the notion of High Culture, frozen in a risk-averse institutional narcissism that was afraid to err. Nor did they take the contrarian position of becoming MoMA’s opposite: MoMA was not

determinative either by mimesis or opposition. The originality of MOCA was that it listened to Los Angeles. It didn’t retail what it already knew but was curious about what it didn’t know.

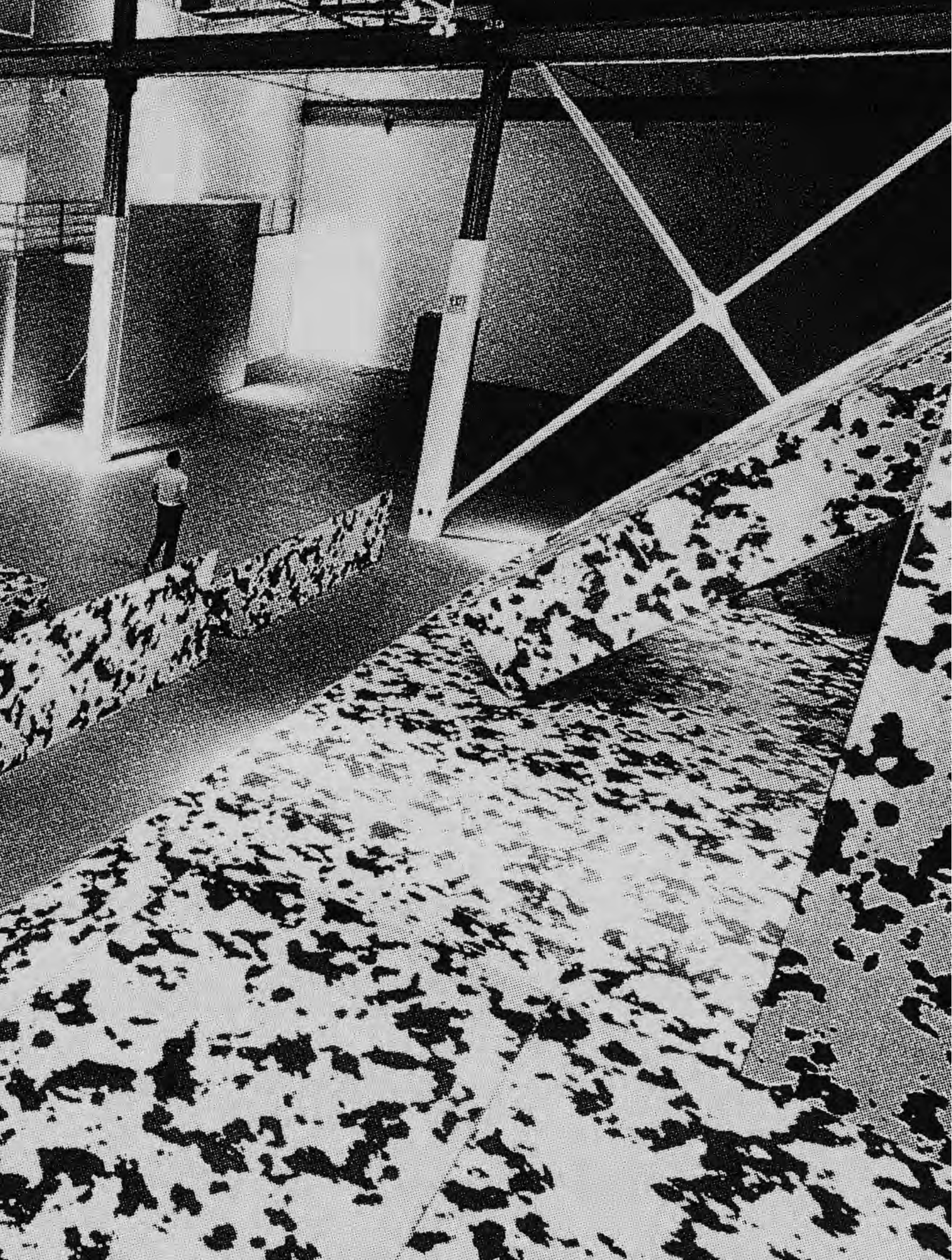
Instead of an overly structured museum of curators hearing their counterparts, MOCA curators tapped into artist networks. Systematically visiting studios in Los Angeles during Koshalek’s tenure, curators found that artists talked to each other. They commended the work of other artists in a skein of living oral history that helped structure the museum’s curiosity, openness, and direction. An artist wielding a paintbrush or welding steel proved to be a direct conduit of information. Just as some newspapers empower editors over writers, some museums belong more to trustees than to artists. MOCA stayed close to the artist.

Another telling difference distinguished MOCA from MoMA. With curatorial fiefdoms and the heavy hand of trustees, MoMA had a history of getting in the way of itself and moving slowly. Koshalek consciously trimmed his museum, keeping it lean, entrusting curators to act on their own without invasive trustee oversight. Koshalek’s MOCA became and stayed a nimble, rapid-response museum that moved quickly: speed helped keep the museum contemporary. MOCA saw and seized opportunities, and with its guerrilla attitude, operated expeditiously. “We needed momentum as well as respect, and never slowed down,” he said, looking back through the perspective of twenty years.

As in law, MOCA set precedents, and beyond material facts like buildings and paintings and the legacy of its







“WE NEVER SAID NO TO AN ARTIST,” SAID KOSHALEK. “BECAUSE WE HAD THIS LARGE SPACE, WE COULD AND DID ENCOURAGE ARTISTS TO DO MORE, THINK BIGGER, AND THEN WE WOULD PROVIDE ALL THE RESOURCES.”

shows, catalogues, and original scholarship, precedent constituted a tacit but important part of the 1999 hand-off. Koshalek’s own always-in-motion character translated into a dynamic expansionism and activism that established a pattern within his tenure. When he first came to Los Angeles, he saw the museum as territory, as a field bounded by downtown’s four freeways, with programs that could be sited outside museum walls. His playbook, written with Marcy Goodwin, was multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and expansive, involving architecture, installation, and video as well as more traditional media such as painting, sculpture, and photography. Performance art was an appropriate form for a performative museum that took an active rather than passive role in the life of the city. Koshalek’s museum was a verb.

The museum that Koshalek led was scrappy and edgy, an open system unafraid of the new and experimental. Besides Richard Serra’s monumental *Torqued Ellipses*, even horses were allowed inside the precincts of the cavernous warehouse adapted by Frank Gehry. The size and rawness of the barn-like Temporary Contemporary allowed artists to scale up their shows and almost attack the building. “We never said No to an artist,” said Koshalek. “Because we had this large space, we could and did encourage artists to do more, think bigger, and then we would provide all the resources. We had large-scale, building-wide shows for Dan Flavin, Jim Turrell, Michael Heizer, and Barbara Kruger, and the scale achieved a critical mass that generated energy. People came to see something impactful.” From show to show, the spatially malleable TC changed dramatically. Big walls disappeared or moved. Environmental changes conforming to the artists’ vision, coupled with their own unexpected artistic

asymmetries, generated surprise. The museum’s wilder side drew visitors and patronage. It was provocative rather than polite. Things happened.

The road to museological success is paved with good intentions, but it was skill and entrepreneurial initiative—Koshalek’s, his staff’s and that of key trustees—more than intentions or any social inevitability that made the vision possible. Money, however instrumental for the vision, was never the goal. Koshalek deployed multiple strategies to bring MOCA’s good intentions off, not the least of which was inventive, non-stop fundraising. “Not a day went by without my going to see someone for funding,” he remembered. Of course there were several major downtown corporations, including ARCO, Security Pacific Bank, Times Mirror, and Citibank, which he corralled for the initial founding endowment of \$14 million. One of the “Lists of 25” that he liked to draft into his to-do agenda included major funders outside the city: he pursued Leslie H. Wexner, Gianni Agnelli, Henry Ford II, Akio Toyoda, Minoru Mori, and Steve Ross from Time Warner, among twenty others.

But there was a grass-roots strategy embedded in another List of 25, smaller donors who had made money more modestly, manufacturing backpacks or pillows, for example. The museum asked those twenty-five to stage at-home fundraising dinners or cocktails, all of whom in turn invited their guests to host dinners or cocktails for another twenty-five. Adopting the logic of chain letters, Koshalek, working with trustee Gary Familian, launched the idea of exponential funding. In a one-year period, he, Hultén, and trustee Fred Nicholas visited one hundred houses to sell their pitch.



MOCA ADDED MULTIPLE AUDIENCES BY MULTIPLYING DISCIPLINES BEYOND PAINTING AND SCULPTURE TO INCLUDE ARCHITECTURE, VIDEO, INSTALLATION, DESIGN, ELECTRONIC MEDIA, LECTURES, PERFORMANCE ART, AND EVEN THEATER.

COUNTERINTUITIVELY, THE INSTITUTION WAS, IN ITS POSTURE AND OUTLOOK, ANTI-INSTITUTIONAL, INFORMAL WITHOUT BEING CASUAL, OPEN YET DISCIPLINED, RISK-TAKING BUT NOT RECKLESS. THE INSTITUTION HAD A SOUL.

“Everything was a fundraising opportunity—exhibitions, the tours of exhibitions we originated, the catalogues, galas, events, auctions, lunches,” said Koshalek. “We read the obituaries in the newspapers. We were predatory.”

Koshalek, working closely with administrator Sherri Geldin, knew in any one year how much money he had to raise by establishing an expense budget of, say, \$10 million, and then subtracting likely admissions, grants, and donations, arriving at a figure for the deficit, a sum he’d have to raise within a year. Each year was a new treadmill.

But without a collection, there was no there there, and even before the construction of Arata Isozaki’s “permanent” building, Koshalek—encouraged early on by Robert Irwin and trustees Lenore Greenberg and Beatrice Gersh—pursued what became a successful policy of collecting collections instead of individual works. Acquiring single works was an endless task, for which the museum didn’t have adequate funds, and the effort would have taken decades. Los Angeles artists, including Sam Francis and Ed Moses, donated numerous works. A try-harder MOCA left no stone unturned.

By 1999, MOCA had a broad and deep collection that represented art from the 1940s through the 1980s, a collection that would become the envy of LACMA, which, on Michael Govan’s watch as director, tried to acquire MOCA long after Koshalek left, when MOCA was in tight financial straits.

Integral to MOCA’s expansionary policy under Koshalek was establishing cultural reach by affiliating with other institutions. Locally, he cultivated affinities with the Los

Angeles Public Library, the Mark Taper Forum, and City Hall, particularly during Mayor Tom Bradley’s terms. Institutional expansion was even the subject of another of Koshalek’s List of 25: MOCA could collaborate with museums around the world on shows and programs, generating income and elevating MOCA’s international stature and profile. MOCA earned its place on the international cultural map.

The audience for a downtown museum was, at first, limited because there was no residential constituency with an established or even promising interest in museums: the middle class had decamped more than a generation before to the suburbs. On the one hand, the audience for the museum that did exist was organic, based in a large, informed and active community of artists and patrons who supported contemporary art. MOCA added multiple audiences by multiplying disciplines beyond painting and sculpture to include architecture, video, installation, design, electronic media, lectures, performance art, and even theater. Multiplying genres worked: In the same 1991 season, the Isozaki show outdrew the Ed Ruscha show, attracting Los Angeles’s large architectural community as well as a lay audience. Interdisciplinarity was a conviction in itself but also a strategy for building audience.

If Koshalek multiplied the audience, he also operated at multiple scales simultaneously: locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Los Angeles itself was dispersed, and Koshalek ignored no part of the city, whether Malibu, Orange County, Pasadena, or the San Fernando Valley. Further afield, Koshalek, Irwin, and Hultén internationalized the museum, bringing it additional reach and stature by inviting such art-world personages as Count Panza, Dominique de Menil, Seiji Tsutsumi, and Peter Ludwig

onto the board. “We were dealing with all of L.A., but also beyond L.A.,” Koshalek said. “You couldn’t build a wall around the city.” The scope of collecting went beyond the well-traveled New York-Europe axis to include Asia (especially Japan). Alma Ruiz developed a robust Latin American initiative.

Pulling out all the stops, Koshalek regarded the press as his ally in building the institution, and rather than waiting for a call, he initiated contacts, arranging meetings with journalists and critics on his many trips throughout the U.S. and abroad. He informed journalists about shows and programs still in the works, and not just about shows soon to open. He made himself accessible but also spoke accessibly, recounting stories with quotable detail and anecdote told from the inside. Koshalek himself dressed like a businessman, rotating the three gray suits he owned, each indistinguishable from the other. Shirts were white and his ties—when he wore them—uneventful. The boredom was designed. He kept the eye on MOCA rather than himself, rarely granting interviews for a profile, which he thought deflected attention from the institution.

Of course, the MOCA that Koshalek delivered in his hand-over to his successor was a collaborative effort, and the former director generously credits many individuals and an army of volunteers, starting with the people who figured on his Lists of 25. But Koshalek was the common denominator driving most initiatives, making good use of MOCA’s human capital: he unleashed the energies of his staff with a policy of allowing them professional latitude. But he was, by and large, the author of its character and the architect of the organization in which the attitude took hold and prospered.

By the time he passed the baton in 1999, MOCA was more than the sum total of collections, square footage, endowment, track record, staff, precedent, and attitude. He had shaped an institution. The baton was a museum that was vital, consequential, and in his phrase, “impactful,” a complex, locally rooted, ambitious, internationally respected cultural ecosystem. As a presence and a force, MOCA had taken its place as a leader among American and international museums. Counterintuitively, the institution was, in its posture and outlook, anti-institutional, informal without being casual, open yet disciplined, risk-taking but not reckless. The institution had a soul.

But the question that accompanied Koshalek’s hand-off was whether an institution so stamped by the energies and viewpoint of its director was sustainable in regimes led by other directors. Would subtracting Koshalek from the equation yield a museum with the same reach, depth, and achievement? By de-institutionalizing the museum, he made it especially susceptible to the variable qualities and capabilities of directors who arrived on Grand Avenue. Perhaps Koshalek’s strength would become the museum’s weakness: Did the drive of the museum depend on his drive? Had he embedded his leadership into the trajectory of a museum that needed him or his equivalent? If he was its armature, had the museum built a sufficient armature of its own going forward?

Only time and cultural history will tell if Koshalek’s twenty years amounted to MOCA’s “golden age.” What is certain is that when Koshalek passed the baton, the museum led the race.



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A TRIBUTE TO THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

From the very first days of MOCA's inception, photographers played a crucial role in capturing and documenting the visual history of the museum's creation. The museum and the public owe each of these artists/photographers a tremendous debt of gratitude for their contribution, not only to contemporary art, but to cultural history.

We are proud to list the following photographers whose work has immeasurably enhanced this book. We hasten to add that there were many others who recorded the museum's creation and growth as well.

Alma Ruiz  
Fall 2021

Alan Berliner  
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**Inside Cover** Chris Burden, *Exposing the Foundation of the Museum*, 1986, *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986*, 1986, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Collection of the artist.  
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**PP 20–21** Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Questions)*, 1990, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Michael Webb.  
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**P 70** Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza di Biumo, Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza, Varese, 1966. Photo: Ugo Mulas; © Ugo Mulas Heirs. All rights reserved.  
**P 74** Taft Schreiber at home with Alberto Giacometti's *Large Standing Woman II*, 1960, and *Large Standing Woman III*, 1960. The Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; given in loving memory of her husband, Taft Schreiber, by Rita Schreiber. Photographer unknown; photo courtesy Lenore S. Greenberg. Art: © Succession Alberto Giacometti / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY 2022.  
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**P 75** Installation view of *Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990*, at The Menil Collection, Houston, 1999. Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston; courtesy Menil Archives. Art: © 2022 Sam Francis Foundation, California / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.  
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**PP 88–89** Jackson Pollock, *Number 1*, 1949, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection; given in loving memory of her husband, Taft Schreiber, by Rita Schreiber. Photo: Tom Vinetz; courtesy Lenore S. Greenberg. Art: © 2022 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.  
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**P 137** The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1986. Photo: Michael Moran.  
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**P 151** (bottom) Pontus Hultén, Richard Koshalek, and Marcia Simon Weisman, opening night, *Available Light*, 1983. Photo: Garry Winogrand; © The Estate of Garry Winogrand; courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

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**P 155** Betye Saar: *Oasis*, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Tom Leeson. Art: © Betye Saar, courtesy of the artist and Roberts Projects Los Angeles, California.

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**P 158** *The Street Show*, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Squidids & Nunns.

**P 159** James Turrell, in *Occluded Front*, 1985, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Squidids & Nunns. Art: © James Turrell.

**P 161** Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969, in Nevada, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photographer unknown. Art: © Michael Heizer.

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**P 163** (bottom) Installation view from the exhibition *Robert Irwin*, The Pace Gallery, Beverly Hills, California, September 13–October 12, 1985. Photo: Bill Jacobson, courtesy Pace Gallery. Art: © 2022 Robert Irwin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

**P 164** (top) Dan Flavin, “monument” for *V. Tatlin*, 1969, Gift of Lenore S. and Bernard A. Greenberg, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Squidids & Nunns. Art: © 2022 Stephen Flavin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

**P 164** (bottom) *Dan Flavin: “monuments” for V. Tatlin*, 1984, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Squidids & Nunns. Art: © 2022 Stephen Flavin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

**P 165** Mark Rothko room, *The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Panza Collection*, 1985, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Squidids & Nunns. Art: © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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**P 170** Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #88*, 1981, The Barry Lowen Collection, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Squidids & Nunns. Art: © Cindy Sherman, courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

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**P 176** Philip and Beatrice Gersh, Beverly Hills. Photographer unknown; courtesy Susan and David Gersh.

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**P 179** *Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses*, 1989, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Marvin Rand; courtesy Hodgetts + Fung.

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**Endpapers** The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984-86. Photos: Joe Deal, courtesy of Frederick M. Nicholas.

Love to  
Elizabeth and Anne

Appreciation to  
Martin and Mickey Friedman

—Richard Koshalek



*A History for the Future:  
The Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Los Angeles, 1979–2000*

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